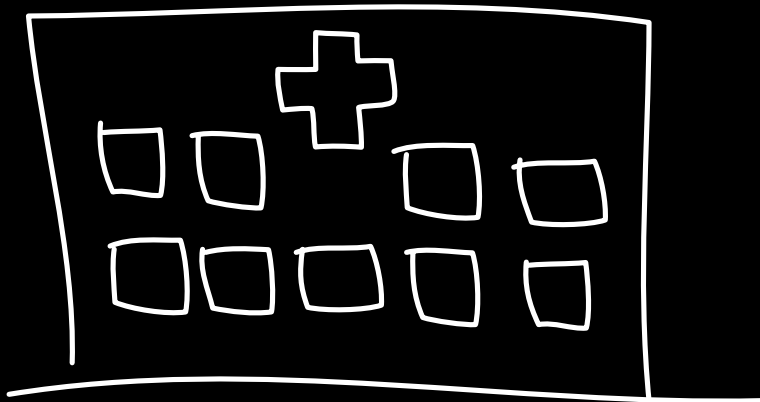
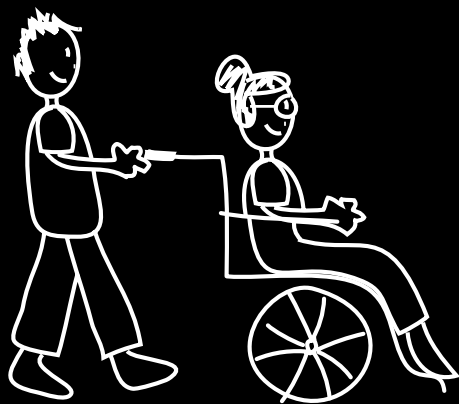
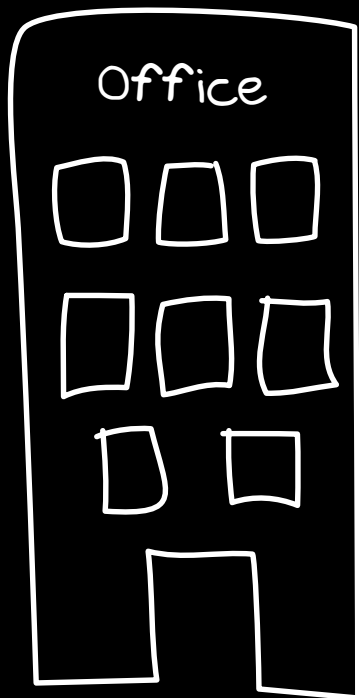




Balancing The Needs of Families and Employers

Family and Medical Leave Surveys

2000 Update



**Balancing the Needs
of Families and Employers:
Family and Medical Leave Surveys**

Containing

**A Statement by the Secretary of Labor,
Alexis M. Herman**

**A Report by Westat on Family and
Medical Leave**

“If you or any American has to choose between being a good parent and being successful in your careers, you have paid a terrible price, and so has your country.”

President Bill Clinton
May 23, 1999

**Statement from
Alexis M. Herman
Secretary of Labor**

For the past eight years, President Clinton and Vice President Gore have been guided by three core values: building a *community* of all Americans; creating *opportunity* for all Americans; and demanding *responsibility* from all Americans. Pursuing policies based on these values has resulted in tremendous progress for our nation, particularly for America's working families. This Administration has worked hard for working families – those who need help in getting a pay raise, in training for and finding good jobs, or in balancing work and family needs.

Raising Incomes

One of the President's most basic beliefs is that no one who works hard and plays by the rules should live in poverty. Work needs to pay. That is why the effort to increase the minimum wage was so important in 1996 and why it is so important today as we seek another increase. In addition to increasing the minimum wage, the Administration worked in other ways to increase family income. We dramatically expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit, which in 1998 lifted 4.3 million people out of poverty, twice as many as in 1993. The President's Welfare-to-Work initiative helped hundreds of thousands of Americans move from dependency to lives of work and self-sufficiency. And the 1998 bipartisan Work Incentives Improvement Act will allow millions of Americans with disabilities to take jobs without fear of losing their Medicare or Medicaid coverage. During these last eight years, the President also advocated equal pay for equal work -- because women cannot properly support their families as long as they earn only seventy-five cents for every dollar a man earns.

Improving Skills

Hand in hand with the push for decent wages is the effort to provide workers with the skills they need to get good jobs in today's economy. That is why at the Labor Department, we started a

Youth Opportunity Movement that is providing skills training to thousands of young people in areas of high unemployment. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 also enabled us to build new local partnerships to deliver effective education and training to workers who need help.

All of these efforts have paid off. Over 22.3 million new jobs have been created since 1993, the most jobs ever under a single Administration. This year, the unemployment rate fell to a low of 3.9 percent, half the rate of the high eight years earlier. Not only have we had the highest but also the longest continued period of real wage growth in over three decades. Real incomes of households have risen for an unprecedented fifth year in a row. And the overall poverty rate has declined from 15.1 percent in 1993 to 11.8 percent in 1999, a twenty-year low.

Balancing work and family

Working families, however, need more than a good job at a decent wage -- they need the time and flexibility to be able to care for their families. The price of workplace success must not be family failure. As more and more women have entered the workforce, they have brought with them a deep concern about the parallel needs of their families. At this time of unprecedented prosperity in America, many workers have a sense of being harder pressed, and increasingly stressed, as they try to juggle the competing demands of work and family.

There is a growing consensus that a time of strong economic growth must also be a time for government and employers to develop new policies that strengthen families and improve the quality of life for working people. In fact, in the new economy family-friendly policies are part of the bottom line. They are about smart business. Employers who respect the legitimate needs of their employees are rewarded by increased loyalty and increased productivity.

The challenge to help families balance work and home is one that the Clinton-Gore Administration has gladly met. Federal funding for child care has more than doubled, helping parents pay for the care of about 1.9 million children in 1999. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act increased child care funding by \$4 billion over six years to provide child care assistance to families moving from welfare to work. And the Adoption and Safe Families Act made sweeping changes in adoption law so that thousands of children in foster care can move more quickly into safe and permanent homes.

But one of the most important and successful steps taken in this Administration to help workers balance the competing demands of work and family was enactment of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) – the first legislation signed by President Clinton. The Act allows workers to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a seriously ill child, spouse or parent; a newborn, newly adopted or newly placed child; or for their own serious health problem, without fear of losing their jobs. More than six in ten American workers are covered and eligible under the Act and *over 35 million covered and eligible workers have benefited from taking leave for family and medical reasons since 1993.*

Results from the 2000 family and medical leave surveys

The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act established the bipartisan Commission on Family and Medical Leave to assess family and medical leave policies. The Commission, through its 1995 surveys, found that the FMLA was working well -- at least for those who were covered and eligible under the Act and could afford to take leave. The Commission also found that the FMLA had not been the burden to business that some had feared.

This past year, the Department of Labor commissioned updates to the 1995 employee and employer surveys. The enclosed report by Westat offers a comprehensive look at the findings of the surveys.

What do these findings mean for America's working families? First, we know that the FMLA provides important protections for millions of workers. Nearly 24 million workers took leave for FMLA reasons during the survey period. Of those, over 15 million worked for employers covered by the Act and were eligible under the Act. While on average, workers who took family and medical leave did so infrequently and for relatively short periods of time, we know that these leaves were important to them. Nearly half took their longest leave to attend to their own serious health condition, while over one-quarter needed the time off to take care of a seriously ill family member. And almost one in five used their leave to care for their newborn, newly adopted, or newly placed foster child. Without the FMLA, many of these workers might have been forced to choose between their family and their jobs.

Second, we know that many working families did *not* get enough help as they tried to balance work and family needs. While worrying about their own health or that of a family member, or

cares for their newborn child, millions of these workers were also worrying about their pay check. In fact the number one worry, cited by more than half of leave takers, was about having enough money to pay bills. The survey found that more than one-third of employees received no pay during their longest leave and that nearly two out of every five leave takers had to cut their leave short due to lost pay.

Pay was not just a worry to those on leave but was a barrier to those who needed to take leave. The current survey found that lack of pay was the number one reason workers who needed leave did not take it. In fact, it is a growing problem. In 2000, a higher proportion of those who needed leave cited this as one of the reasons they did not take leave than was the case in 1995. The importance of pay cannot be overstated -- almost 88 percent of those who needed leave said they would have taken leave if they had received some or additional pay.

In all, the survey found that there are still over three and one-half million workers who needed to take time off from work but did not do so. This need was not for an extra day off for vacation or to run errands -- almost half of these workers needed leave for their own serious health condition and nearly one in four needed to care for an ill parent.

While the Act has brought progress, many employees still worry that their job might be lost if they take time off from work. Almost one-third of all workers who needed leave but did not take it cited worries about losing their job as a reason for not taking leave. We must do better. Indeed, the 2000 survey found that more than four in five employees believed every worker should be able to have up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave in a year for family and medical problems. Unfortunately, nearly two in five workers are not protected by the FMLA.

Next steps

We know many challenges remain for working families. The 2000 surveys show that the Family and Medical Leave Act is still an important tool for workers trying to balance work and family, but that more help is needed -- so that more workers are given the protections of the Act and that help making leave affordable is provided. As President Clinton has said, all working Americans should be able to take the time they need to *care for their families* without losing the income they must have to *support their families*. Yet this must be done in a way that does not undermine our dynamic and growing economy.

The Department of Labor has already taken one step to help working families who cannot afford to take time off. In June 2000, the Department issued a rule permitting States to experiment with providing unemployment compensation to parents who take approved leave or who otherwise leave employment following the birth or adoption of a child.

But more can be done. We offer some ideas for future action:

- **Expand coverage of the FMLA to more workers.** Workers need to be able to take time off for family and medical emergencies and not worry about losing their job.
- **Find new ways to provide paid leave to workers.** Innovative ways need to be found to provide income support to those workers who cannot deal with serious family and medical emergencies because they cannot afford to take off time from work.

I believe that we can meet this challenge. Providing a work and family balance will not only help business prosper but will strengthen our families and help our nation in the global economy.

Alexis M. Herman

January 2001