

To whom it may concern,

My name is Dr. Natalie Dvorak, and I am a general pediatrician in the Fargo/Moorhead area. I was born and raised in Grand Forks, and I graduated University of North Dakota Medical School. I practice in Moorhead and Fargo. I am writing in support of a paid family medical leave study for the health and wellness of all my North Dakota patients and their families.

As a pediatrician, I am a physician for newborns through young adults. A large part of my day to day is seeing newborns and infants. I see firsthand the struggles faced by my patients and their families due to lack of paid family medical leave. Anyone who is a parent knows that taking care of a child is one of the most important and challenging experiences in one's life. In this letter, I will tell you the health benefits of paid family medical leave.

Most of the research conducted on this matter is regarding paid maternity leave. Paid maternity leave has several health benefits for mom's and infants. It is associated with lower infant mortality. In North Dakota, we care about the lives of babies. It increases breastfeeding duration and improves maternal and infant bonding. Breastmilk is the best nutrition for an infant, and it helps protect them from infections. Breastfeeding has benefits for mothers too including lowering the risk of ovarian and breast cancer, decreasing bleeding after delivery, and helps with weight loss. Breastfeeding is incredibly demanding on a mother and takes 4-6 weeks to establish. Therefore a mother returning to work in that amount of time is very unlikely to be able to exclusively breastfeed their infant.

Mothers that receive paid maternity leave are more likely to bring their children to doctors' visits for immunizations and preventative medical care. We all know that immunizations prevent serious infections. I made the referral to a cardiologist for severe heart disease at a well child visit, which likely prevented this child from needing a heart transplant. Lastly, paid maternity leave is associated with reduced maternal stress and reduced risk of postpartum depression and anxiety.

Many people may think that employers already provide paid family leave; however, this is just not true in my experience. It is not uncommon for me to hear moms returning to work within in 2-6 weeks. Most of the dads I see take only 1-2 weeks off. Infants less than three months are at elevated risk of contracting serious infectious illnesses. I have taken care of so many infants that are critically ill from RSV that was contracted through daycare.

Lastly, I recently had a baby. My maternity leave was unpaid time off. I am fortunate to have a job that allows me financial security; however, growing my family has significant financial implications as I am the major bread winner for my family. These days it is very common for women to be major financial contributors for their families.

I urge you all today to support SCR 4018 for the health and wellness of our children, our most precious ND residents, and their families.

Sincerely,

Dr. Natalie Dvorak

Pediatrician

Sanford Health

