

Working Parents Rely on Paid Leave and Supportive Workplaces

PEPS advocates for policy changes that provide families with a foundation of stability. In late 2024, PEPS surveyed our community about their experiences using Washington State's Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program and returning to work after bringing home a child. This survey was done to better understand families' needs in relation to PFML policy enhancements and postpartum worker policy protections.

We received an enthusiastic response from nearly 300 respondents, providing more than 700 comments, with most coming in the first three days, showing us how important this topic is to parents in our community. These findings will help guide our advocacy work moving forward.



[It was] so helpful to have the time off to not worry about income and job protection.

Accessing Paid Leave is Critical for New and Growing Families

Most respondents had someone in their household use PFML. Washington State's PFML program supported parents by providing financial stability and job protection.

The program gave parents time to recover from childbirth and address health concerns for the birthing parent and/or their baby. Many respondents attributed their partner's active involvement in caring for their newborn to their access to leave.

Due to current policy, some aspects of PFML were challenging for families:

- worry about job security (1 in 4)
- an overwhelming application process, including timing and the need to file weekly claims
- burdensome payment delays

Recommendations for PFML enhancements:

- Allow advance applications to expedite approval and payments.
- Provide better guidance for applicants seeking both medical and bonding leave.
- Enhance education and guidance to employers and Human Resources professionals about the overlap of federal and state laws and benefits.
- Simplify eligibility and job protection policies so everyone who pays in can benefit from PFML.

Workplaces Need to Do More to Support Working Parents

Although most respondents reported that their workplaces supported their lactation needs, nearly 30% of working parents experienced challenges, such as:

- the physical environment
- schedule and workload
- policies and organizational support
- the need for a private and clean space to pump
- protected pumping time

When asked how their workplace could better support them as working parents, respondents shared a need for:

- more schedule flexibility
- options for remote work

Recommendations for postpartum worker protections:

- Ensure all working parents have access to pump breaks and private, clean spaces to pump breast milk.
- Explore policies that require workplaces to provide more flexibility in the first year after bringing home a new baby. For example, working from home or modified hours.



We have an open-concept office. I still pump but face a wall to have some privacy.