

Oral Testimony of Adrienne N. Schweer

Before the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee Hearing entitled:
In Their Own Words: Paid Leave, Child Care, and an Economy that Failed Women
April 21, 2021

Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's important hearing.

My name is Adrienne Schweer. While I am here in my capacity as a Fellow at the Bipartisan Policy Center, where I lead the organization's Paid Family Leave project, I am also here as a mother of four very young children, who like so many women across America, has been stretched to the bone by this pandemic.

Paid family leave is one of those rare issues that enjoys broad bipartisan support, not only across the country but here in Congress as well. Within the last few years, three bold bipartisan pieces of legislation have passed into law: 1) a new program providing federal employees with 12 weeks of paid parental leave; 2) an important bipartisan pilot program providing employers with 25% tax credits for extending paid parental, family caregiving or medical leave to low and middle wage workers which was extended in December for another five years; 3) and most importantly, Congress quickly acted to create an emergency paid family and sick leave program to support millions of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the title of today's hearing indicates, the pandemic has highlighted a long-standing structural problem: families are struggling to balance work and life – particularly women with children and women who are primary caregivers. These unprecedented challenges have now, over in the last year, turned into a full-blown crisis.

A survey of women conducted last Fall by Morning Consult and the Bipartisan Policy Center found that women were more than twice as likely as men to have left work during the pandemic due to child care responsibilities or school closures. Our survey showed that nearly 40% of women with children under the age of two had left work, which was nearly double that of women with older children.

Another survey by BPC and Morning Consult found that roughly a quarter of unemployment insurance recipients were spending most of their time caring for a loved one. Among parents not looking for work, nearly 60% cited caregiving responsibilities as the reason they were not in the workforce.

The problem is clear and the status quo is unacceptable. And I believe we have a solution. Emergency, patchwork measures can provide temporary relief, but they should not be mistaken for long term solutions. To achieve lasting change that will benefit our working women, children, families, businesses, and ultimately our country, we must look at the flaws in current federal law and fix them in a bipartisan way, leveraging regular order so a diverse set of stakeholders can be part of the process.

Hearings like this one today are critical to building the support and bipartisanship will needed to achieve this goal. I thank you again for the opportunity to speak, we look forward to any questions you may have.