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Paid family leave: An employee benefit that benefits employers

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By Amy Hall

The **holiday season** can be a time of great joy. But for many working parents, the **holidays** are also a stark reminder of how tenuous their employment and benefits are.

When you have paid time off, spending time with family is joyous, but what if you were forced to take time off to care for yourself or a family member?

By one estimate, 23% of Americans have either lost a job, or been threatened with the loss of their job, for taking time off to care for themselves or another family member. For many Americans, there's no good option: Either you worry about your family member, or you worry about losing your **job**. And nobody is productive when they're stressed.

Of course, for **business** owners and managers, it's not just productivity they worry about. For example, employers might want to provide paid leave, but feel that the **business** can't afford to.

Luckily there is a solution. Just over one year ago, **Senator Kirsten Gillibrand** introduced the **FAMILY Act** that would create a national paid family leave insurance program. As **Congress** looks to the new year, companies like **EILEEN FISHER** look forward to seeing the **FAMILY Act** reintroduced and passed.

Family leave insurance programs let employees pay into a program that will fund paid leave following the birth of a child. For



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people whose employers don't offer paid leave, these programs are invaluable.

Of course, some employers do offer leave, precisely because it's good for employees. For example, at **EILEEN FISHER**, we support our employees with a comprehensive benefits package, including as much as 12 weeks of paid leave following a birth or **adoption** (including leave for fathers as well as mothers), reimbursement for **adoption** expenses, and flexible work schedules. The result is a loyal, productive, and efficient workforce.

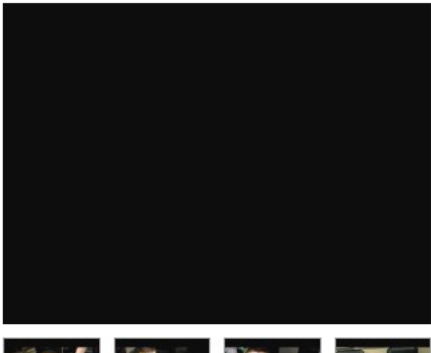
At **EILEEN FISHER**, we believe so strongly that this program would be good for the country that we've signed on to a **petition** from the **American Sustainable Business Council Action Fund** supporting the **FAMILY** Act. We encourage all businesses to sign on.

Critics have made the same arguments we always hear about programs like these: that they're too costly, or that they place a heavy burden on businesses. But the evidence shows the opposite. Family leave insurance programs in California and New Jersey have been in place for years, and a third just took effect in **Rhode Island** this year. Not only have businesses not suffered because of them, they've thrived. Companies have reported improved employee loyalty and less turnover; in California, 60 percent of businesses actually **cut costs** by coordinating their benefits with the state's program.

This is precisely why **EILEEN FISHER** offers these benefits – because when our employees don't have to worry about how they'll pay the bills during an already stressful period in their lives, it's easier for them to focus when they work, and the more productive they are, the better we all do.

Passage of the **FAMILY** Act would allow more businesses to join us in this effort. The new year represents a chance to **start** with a clean slate and really bring change that will help businesses across the country and millions of Americans. We urge **Congress** to act on the **FAMILY** Act in the new year.

Amy Hall is Director of Social Consciousness for EILEEN FISHER, a women's fashion design and manufacturing company based in Irvington, NY.



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