Policy Leadership Series:
An Introduction to Work-Family Issues for State Legislators

A Network Supporting Research and Teaching,
Promoting Best Practices at the Workplace,
and Informing State Policy

Online resources at:
www.bc.edu/wfnetwork
This packet, “Linking Strong Families and Effective Workplaces: A Path to Policy Leadership,” was prepared by the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in collaboration with the National Conference of State Legislatures. The information contained in this packet focuses on one of the most defining issues of our time: work and family.

This folder outlines why work-family issues are vital to three important groups:

- Working families
- Employers
- Policy-makers

We have organized the packet in six sections, with each section focusing on a specific question:

- What is “work-family” policy?
- Who are “working families”?
- How do the work-family issues affect your constituents?
- How do work-family issues affect business effectiveness?
- What are some of the options for policy leaders?

How can the Sloan Work and Family Research Network help you?

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network at Boston College has been providing quality information and other resources to work-family researchers since 1997. Beginning in 2005, the Sloan Network will be collaborating with the National Conference of State Legislatures to reach out to state legislators and offer timely information about working families. These resources will include:

- Selected statistics on different work-family issues.
- Legislative briefs that summarize different issues and explain how these issues are important to businesses and to your constituents.
- Papers and reports about work-family research, public policies, and business innovations.
- Information about people and organizations that have expertise about work and family issues.
- Summary charts of state statutes and bills relevant to work-family issues.

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network is fully supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Please visit our website at www.bc.edu/wfnetwork to locate information relevant to state policy-making. You should also feel free to contact us at wfnetwork@bc.edu.
State legislators who are committed to the development of sustainable and successful state economies realize that workforce development is a key success factor. And, policy-makers interested in strengthening the social fabric of our communities understand that strong families – in all their diversities – anchor our social well-being.

Historically, we have tended to think about “workforce development issues” as being separate from “family issues.” One of the policy challenges of the 21st century is to create new ways of thinking about work-family policy.

- The “work-family” way of thinking means that policy debates about workforce development would acknowledge that a majority of employees have a range of responsibilities for their family lives, in addition to their responsibilities for their jobs.
- Furthermore, the “work-family” way of thinking would recognize that a majority of families are working families; that is, they are families where the adults participate in the labor force over the course of their lives.

The current structure of legislative committees can make it difficult for legislators to link their debates about workforce development with their discussions about families.

- At present, three-fourths of our states (76%) have standing committees for workforce development [or employment]. In addition, one-third (32%) have committees that focus specifically on families or children. Although virtually every state has a business association or family advocacy group which is attempting to address some aspect of work-family issues, at present no state has a formal committee with an explicit focus on work-family issues.

There is a compelling case for making connections between policies that affect workforce development and policies that affect families.

Work-family issues are important to families, and most families are actively making efforts to manage the work and family aspects of their lives. There is plenty of evidence that work-family issues are also important to businesses because employers know that these issues very often affect employees’ performance when they are at work.

It is also increasingly apparent that work-family issues are important policy concerns.

Work-family issues are relevant to state policy, in part because the presence or absence of policy supports can make it easier or more difficult for families to manage their responsibilities. For example, state policies might affect the extent to which employers have the flexibility to offer supports to their employees, so that they can stay in the labor force and remain actively engaged at work. State legislators also make important decisions about the employment experiences of state employees, decisions which often become “models” for private sector employers.

There are many options for state legislators who are interested in providing leadership in this arena. Perhaps the most important first step is to begin to have public conversations which put work and family concerns “side by side.”

State Policy Example

Illinois and Pennsylvania have established legislative task forces to examine work and family issues. For instance, in 2001, the Illinois General Assembly created the “Family-Friendly Workplace Task Force.” This task force recommended public policies that would offer incentives for employers to establish family-friendly workplaces. In 2003, Illinois passed Senate Bill 374 which authorized the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to study and promote family-friendly workplaces.

State Policy Example

The 1999 Louisiana Administrative Procedure Act [No. 1185, § 1] 1992 requires that state agencies prepare “family impact statements” which discuss the impact of policies and regulations on family well-being. The provisions of this act specify that the family impact statement should address impacts such as “…The effect on the functioning of the family” and “The effect on family earnings and family budget.”
Working families have two important types of responsibilities: caring for family members and earning the income needed to support their families. The experiences of working families are often referred to as “work-family issues” or “work/life issues.”

Today, most families are working families, and they are distinctly different from the working families of 30 years ago.

- In the past, many married-couple families managed their work and family lives by having each of the two adults assume primary responsibility for “one” of the family’s jobs. Today, however, married-couple families often have “three jobs.” That is, both the husband and the wife are engaged in paid employment and they split the third job of caring for the family and home. In 2002, over two-thirds (68%) of all married-couple families with children were dual earner couples.

Working families with young children often have very “visible” work-family challenges because it is imperative that these parents make arrangements for the care of the children.

Did you know....
In 2002, 60.8% of all married mothers with children under the age of 6 years were in the labor force, as were 76.8% of all married mothers with school age children.

![Labor Force Participation Rates of Mothers](chart)

Although we sometimes think that the term “working families” refers only to young couples with children, in reality, the population of working families is a diverse group.

- Working families are headed by people of all ages. They might be young adults in the workforce (with or without children), working middle-aged adults (with or without children) as well as older adults. People in each of these different age groups may have different types of caregiving responsibilities and often have different preferences with regard to their employment situations. For example, older working families may want flexible options or quality part-time jobs as they “phase” into retirement.

Did you know....
Today, 19.4% of married men and 10.7% of married women who are 65 years and older remain in the labor force. According to research conducted by AARP, approximately 80% of the “baby boomers” in the labor force think they will continue to work “in some capacity” after they have retired, with over half anticipating that they will work on a part-time basis.

- Working families may have responsibilities for family members with extra-ordinary caregiving needs, including children with special needs, adults with disabilities, or dependent elders.

Did you know....
Approximately one-third (35%) of the US workforce reports that they regularly provide care for an elderly parent or relative. Both men and women assume these responsibilities.

- Working families also include single parent families, parents who share the custody of children, and single people living alone who help relatives to care for their families.

Did you know....
Most single parent families are in the labor force. In 2002, 77.8% of the single mothers were in the labor force, as were 83.3% of single fathers.

State Policy Example

The state of Minnesota has established the “At-Home Infant Care” program which allows income-eligible working parents to receive a subsidy in lieu of child care services. This provision in the 2004 Omnibus Budget makes it possible for these parents to have some income security if they choose to take a parental leave and care for their new babies. According to the National Partnership for Working Families, three states have similar statutory provisions: Minnesota, Missouri, and Montana.

State Policy Example

Rhode Island “… has developed innovative initiatives and services to enhance the care children receive while assisting working families in their efforts to find and afford child care.” According to the Rhode Island website, the state’s policies allow “…families to increase their earning power while remaining eligible for child-care assistance. Child-care assistance is available to families who are not participating in the Family Independence Program as well as to those who are participating.” The state’s “…services are designed with the ultimate goal of supporting working parents as they find and maintain employment and improve their economic well-being.”
Of course, working families are concerned about work-family conflicts because these problems affect them directly in many different ways. For example:

- Working families often find that their family schedules and work schedules are “mismatched”.

The typical work day is 8:00-5:00. However, schools may be open only from 8:00-2:30. Unless there are relatives available to supervise school age children during the after-school hours, parents who work full-time may need to make arrangements for their school age children and teenagers. The lives of working families can become quite complicated if the services that working families use to care for dependents, such as elder day care centers, are not open from the beginning to the end of the work day.

Did you know ...

The gap between work and school schedules can amount to as much as 25 hours per week.8

- Shift workers can face difficulty when attempting to locate dependent care services for their family members because, often times, they are not available during the evening or at night.

Did you know ...

Nearly one of every seven U.S. employees works a shift other than a “regular day-time shift.”9

- Although employees are expected to be at work on-time on a regular basis, the needs of families are often unpredictable.

Did you know ...

A recent study found that 30% of employees had to “cut back” their work hours on at least one day a week in order to take care of family responsibilities.10

- Working families frequently report that they are squeezed for time.

Did you know ...

Nearly 20% of US employees work an average of 49 hours or more.11

A typical husband and wife in a dual-earner couple devote 91 hours each week to work when their work hours are added together.12

The 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce found that two-thirds (67%) of working parents report that they do not have enough time with their children.13

- On the other hand, some employees who “want” or “need” to work full-time decide to cut back their work hours – or even leave the labor force altogether – because it is difficult for them to care for their families and meet the demands of a rigid full-time work schedule. This can result in economic hardships for some working families.

Did you know ...

In 2002, 3 of every 10 U.S. workers who worked part-time for reasons other than economic conditions (for example, when the job was seasonal work) made the choice to work part-time either because they had family/personal obligations or they had problems finding child care.14

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**State Policy Example**

California is the first state to offer guaranteed paid family and medical leave to employees in their state. The law provides partial income to employees who need to take time off to care for a new child or seriously ill family member.

According to the National Partnership for Women & Families, “A study prepared by economists at the University of Chicago and the University of California, Berkeley estimated that as a result of this law, California businesses will save up to $89 million a year and the state will save $25 million annually.” See: www.nationalpartnership.org/Default.aspx?tabid=117

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**State Policy Example**

Some state legislatures have passed legislation to encourage state agencies to offer alternative work options to state employees. For example, in 1981, Maine passed 5 M.R.S.A § 901: “The Legislature finds that alternative working hours, including part-time work, job sharing and more flexible work schedules will lead to greater efficiency by state employees. There are many qualified and talented Maine citizens of all ages whose personal responsibilities make it difficult to work full-time or during the traditional hours of employment.”
Unresolved work-family conflicts tend to “spill over” into the workplace. Consequently, work-family issues are of concern to employers.

Did you know...
In many states across the country, groups of employers have gotten together to talk about how they can address some of the pressing work-family issues that impact workplace effectiveness. For example, since its inception, over 300 employers in the San Francisco Bay Area have participated in a group called One Small Step. With the assistance of Purdue University, employers in the mid-west have formed the Midwest Work and Family Association. The Boston College Center for Work & Family has established the New England Work and Family Association for employers interested in work-family issues.

- Businesses need to recruit the “best and the brightest.” Today, many talented employees have extensive family responsibilities. In response, businesses have adjusted their recruitment strategies and have modified the supports that they offer to employees, adding work/life initiatives such as those featured in the annual list of “Best Places for Working Mothers” compiled by Working Mother magazine.

Did you know...
In 2002, over three-fourths (78%) of married employees in the US workforce were members of dual-earner families.13 Without an adult at home on a full-time basis, these employees can find it difficult to meet the range of their responsibilities at home and at work.

- Employees may miss work when they are unable to make arrangements for the unexpected or unusual needs of their families. For example, working families may not be able to find someone to care for an aging relative “on the spur of the moment” when a home health aide cancels for the day.

Did you know...
Nearly one-third (32.1%) of working parents with a child or teenager who has special needs reports that they either have to cut back on their working hours or stop working all together because of the often unpredictable demands of providing care to these children.14

- Employees with unresolved work-family conflicts find it difficult to focus when they are at work.

Did you know...
A recent national survey found that 45% of US employees said that their work and family lives “interfered” with one another.15

Parents who have concerns about what their children may be doing during after-school hours are more distracted at work, leading to decreased productivity.16

- It is costly for businesses to have to replace employees; employers try to limit turnover. Therefore, many of them make efforts to minimize the likelihood that workers with caregiving responsibilities will decide to leave their workforces.

Did you know...
More than one-third (38.5%) of US workers indicate that it is likely/very likely that they will try to find a new job within the next year.17

- The US Department of Labor expects that the increase in the percentage of older workers will be one of the most significant changes in the labor force that will occur during the next 10 years. At present, 56% of the labor force is 40 years or older. The decisions that older workers make about whether or not to remain in the workforce will be affected by their work-family priorities and by the availability of options such as quality part-time work and the availability of services such as eldercare. Some businesses have anticipated these changes in the labor force and are thinking of steps they might be able to take to adapt their policies and practices to the work/life priorities of their older workers.

![Age of US Workforce Projected to 2012](chart.png)

See: [www.twc.state.tx.us/svos/workfamch/wfchp.html](http://www.twc.state.tx.us/svos/workfamch/wfchp.html)
We know that work-family issues are important to families. Many families work hard to manage their job responsibilities and their responsibilities for providing care to their children, spouses, parents and others. Indeed, working people often go to extraordinary lengths to “make things work.”

Did you know... Some people cut down on their sleep as a way to manage all their responsibilities. When compared to mothers who are not in the labor force, working mothers get 6 less hours of sleep each week. Over the course of a month, that is the equivalent to losing 3 nights of sleep.²⁵

We also know that unresolved work-family issues can become business issues. Large numbers of businesses across the country have taken steps to help their employees stay engaged in their work and also meet the needs of their families.

![Availability of Selected Workplace Supports](source: Galinkoy & Bond (1998)]

At the Sloan Work and Family Research Network, we feel that these issues are also policy issues, and that there are tremendous opportunities for state legislators to provide policy leadership for work-family issues.

Public policies affect the choices available to working families and employers. Whereas some laws and regulations create opportunities to support working families, others provide unintended obstacles which could be removed.

There are many policy innovations that could support working families and could promote workplace effectiveness.

### A Sampling of Work-Family Policy Options and Examples of State Innovations

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<tr>
<th>Public policies could increase the access to quality information about working families’ choices for the care of children, persons with disabilities, and elderly relatives.</th>
<th>The website for Utah’s Department of Workforce Services has a direct link to child care resource and referral supports for each county in the state.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public policies could offer grants or contracts to schools and community-based organizations interested in providing important services and supports to working families.</td>
<td>Sixteen states pay higher reimbursement rates to child care providers that offer evening, overnight and weekend child care to accommodate parents’ work schedules. New York City works with Seedco, a nonprofit workforce organization, to provide emergency child care to former TANF recipients and other low-wage workers.</td>
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<td>Public policies could offer incentives to employers interested in experimenting with “new ways to work,” that would benefit both employees and employers, such as flexible work options or telecommuting.</td>
<td>California uses the Temporary Disability Insurance system to provide for paid family leave. Washington provides tax credits for the expenses of telecommuting.</td>
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<td>Public policies could begin to address the mismatch of work hours/work days with school hours and the 10-month school calendar.</td>
<td>Many states have moved from half-day kindergarten sessions to full-day sessions. This change not only results in educational benefits for the children but can also alleviate some of the mismatch between the schedule of the children’s school day and their parents’ work hours. For example, in August 2004, the state of Arizona provided $25 million in state funding to expand access to voluntary full-day kindergarten.</td>
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<td>Public policies could offer work-family supports to state employees. These work-life initiatives could become models for private sector employees.</td>
<td>Arizona has established an adjusted work hours program that includes both flextime and telecommuting for its employees. Twenty-five states have statutory provisions establishing family and medical leave for state employees.</td>
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### How might you start to think about work-family policy?

1. Talk to constituents and colleagues about the connections between work and family issues.
2. Consider the creation of a work-family task force or caucus.
3. Ask the sponsors of workforce development bills to comment on the potential linkages to the experiences of working families.
4. Ask the sponsors of family policy bills to comment on the linkages to employment experiences and business effectiveness.
5. Access the resources of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network and let us know if we can provide you with relevant information.

2This concept has been articulated by Kathleen Christensen of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.


