

White House summit lifts up important policy changes^[1]

Author: Ben-Ishai, Liz

Source: CLASP

Format: Article

Publication Date: 25 Jun 2014

Link to article no longer available

EXCERPTS

Engaged dads who struggle with work/family conflict at higher rates than moms. Executive moms who juggle family responsibilities as their careers soar. Millennials who won't entertain the idea of inflexible workplaces. Businesses that are taking radical steps to level the playing field for diverse employees with varied responsibilities outside of the workplace.

Culture change - or perhaps cultures changing - was in full view at the White House Summit on Working Families, which took place in Washington D.C., on June 23rd. Speaker after speaker emphasized that times have changed and workplace policies need to change with them. Workers shared encouraging stories about the flexibility and fair wages they enjoy. And businesses that offer paid leave and are committed to pay equity underlined that at least some employers are stepping up to the plate to make needed changes.

Yet, cultural change has not touched every worker's life. In fact, millions of workers - particularly lower-wage workers, women, workers from communities of color, and immigrant workers - continue to struggle in jobs with schedules that are unpredictable and inflexible, that don't pay enough to cover the bills, and that offer no paid family leave or even sick days. What these workers need is for cultural change to spur public policy changes - they need minimum standards and protections.

The Obama Administration made a number of announcements at Monday's Summit highlighting initiatives that should both fuel continued cultural changes critical to improving workplaces and establish public policies and legal protections for the most vulnerable workers. These include:

Paid leave: President Obama announced that the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Women's Bureau will offer \$500,000 to states that want to study paid leave. Three states, California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, have already instituted paid family leave insurance programs. The Administration also announced plans to study these existing programs.

Workplace flexibility: The President issued a memorandum calling on heads of federal agencies to improve workplace flexibility options for their employees and give federal workers the right to request flexibility. Laws requiring private employers to give workers the right to request flexibility have recently passed in San Francisco and Vermont.

Access to child care: DOL will provide \$25 million in grants for technical skill training for workers who need child care so they can participate in training activities. Funding will increase access to more flexible training programs and use creative strategies to accommodate participants' caregiving responsibilities and child care needs.

Calls for Congressional action: The President called on Congress to pass the Pregnant Workers' Fairness Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act.

The Obama Administration is taking important steps towards creating family-friendly workplaces for all workers, a vision that was at the center of the inspiring event.

In addition to the state-based strategies for enacting paid family leave that were emphasized in the Executive Actions stemming from the Summit, many advocates, businesses, and workers are eager to see the passage of a national paid family and medical leave insurance program.

In his speech, President Obama acknowledged: "There is only one developed country in the world that does not offer paid maternity leave, and that is us. And that is not the list you want to be on by your lonesome. It's time to change that, because all Americans should be able to afford to care for their families."

Late in 2013, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Representative Rosa DeLauro introduced the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act. If passed by Congress, this program would not only move the U.S. off the shameful list of maternity leave hold-outs mentioned by the President and numerous other Summit speakers, but it would also ensure that workers who are seriously ill or who have sick family members could take time to care for themselves and their loved ones without losing all of their wages.

Such a program makes sense, not just for workers, but also for the economy and for businesses. At the Summit, employers ranging from giants like Johnson & Johnson to smaller businesses like Sugar Bliss Cake Boutique and Zazie Restaurant made the business case for fair workplaces policies. Many businesses, including Sugar Bliss and Zazie, are both putting in place good policies in their own firms and stepping up to support public policies, like the FAMILY Act, that would help all Americans. The Council of Economic Advisers released reports, timed to coincide with the Summit, which lay out the economic realities of paid leave and workplace flexibility. And the reality is,

these policies make sense for everyone.

After an invigorating day that affirmed the necessity for change, highlighted the commitments of our leaders, and showcased the important cultural shifts already underway, the Summit closed with a clear directive to keep pushing forward - to keep trailblazing, as the First Lady described it. Advocates will continue to blaze a trail to the long overdue public policies that workers need most: laws that give them the economic security to ensure they can do their jobs well while also caring for their families.

- reprinted from CLASP

Region: United States ^[2]

Tags: work/life balance ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/07/white-house-summit-lifts-important-policy-changes>
Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/07/white-house-summit-lifts-important-policy-changes> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/5668>