



Delilah

FREE COUNTRY

CLEARING THE PATH: NEXT STEPS

Creating Birmingham's Family-Friendly Workplaces



THE WOMEN'S FUND
OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM



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OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Alabama has recruited industry.
Now, the state must recruit and retain a stronger workforce.*

The challenges are clear: The State Workforce Council predicts a shortage of 115,000 skilled workers by 2020. At the current rate, Alabama will suffer an “alarming” 200,000 worker shortfall by 2030, according to the Alabama Community College System’s 21st Century Workforce Initiative Report.

The Women’s Fund of Greater Birmingham believes that women are key to filling these gaps. Thus, family-friendly workplace policies that benefit both working parents and employers are critical for our region. We all know that many women are mothers and primary caregivers to small children or aging parents, and our economy cannot grow without them. *Clearing the Path: Next Steps* opens the conversation about workplace policies that ensure women are a targeted part of the solution to our state’s workforce challenges.

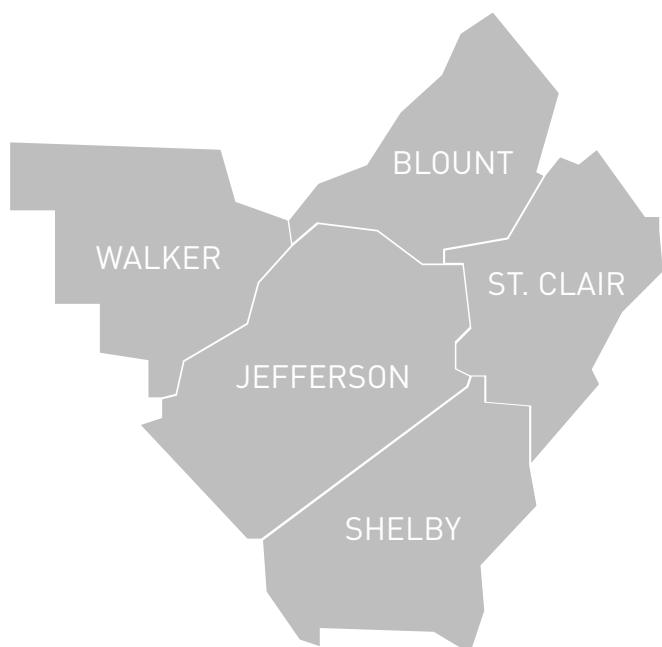


LaCarra White, a single mother who works in patient transport at UAB, was able to move into her own home after getting a raise to \$11/hour.

In Greater Birmingham, smart employers are taking a lead role in advancing family-friendly workplace policies. They realize that a stable workforce is critical to the bottom line, reduced turnover is better for business, and affordable quality child care is necessary for our current and future workforce. Their vision is good for business and good for families.

In this report, we share success stories from a selection of local employers offering innovative policies.

Our goal is to highlight specific policies already working well in Greater Birmingham, provide opportunities for additional employers to learn from their peers, and create momentum for more Alabama corporations and industries to evaluate how their own policies could better balance the needs of families.



Key Findings

Wages



Several large employers including **University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)**, **St. Vincent's Health System**, **AMERICAN Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO)**, **McWane, Inc.**, **Mayer Electric Supply**, and **Regions Financial** have boosted starting wages to more than \$10/hour even while minimum wage in Alabama remains at the federal minimum of \$7.25.

Child care



Corporate support for child care makes quality care more affordable for families. **Regions** provides major corporate support for child care, enabling employees to access lower-cost licensed, backup care during emergencies and school closures, and transitional care for infants awaiting available space at other centers. **Blue Cross and Blue Shield** offers on-site child care at its Hoover complex.

Parental leave



Paid parental leave is expanding in our region. More than half of the responders to our survey offer at least four weeks. Large law firms have begun offering attorneys 16 weeks following the birth or adoption of a child.

We challenge companies of all sizes to establish policies that are more beneficial to hardworking parents—and more likely to attract and retain the valuable workers so needed in Alabama's workforce.

FROM BOARD CHAIR

Leslie H. Carlisle

The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham's mission is to improve women's economic security, particularly for the group most likely to live in poverty: single mothers and their children. In Greater Birmingham 38% of female-headed households remain in poverty, despite low unemployment and gains in our region's economy. The path to economic security for these families begins with higher education and better jobs. Therefore, The Women's Fund creates and supports programs for single mothers to achieve post-secondary certificates in high-demand health and manufacturing jobs, while their children attend quality child care.

Sustainable employment is the next step to economic security. Family-friendly workplace policies bolster stability, reduce chaos, and help make employment sustainable for all parents, most especially for single mothers.

In 2017, The Women's Fund released *Clearing the Path: Removing barriers to sustainable employment for working single mothers*. We interviewed 200 single mothers, working hard, and earning less than \$30,000/year. They shared struggles they face every day balancing child care and long shifts, parent-teacher meetings and inflexible work schedules, low wages and high rent, sick toddlers, yet no paid sick leave. Their challenges were real, but not insurmountable.

Based on themes that emerged in our research, we began conversations with employers. In May 2017, we brought together local employers, human resources professionals, and experts on issues affecting women in the workplace to discuss how family-friendly policies can benefit the corporate bottom line. Attendees at this event overwhelmingly said they wanted us to

Family-friendly workplace policies bolster stability, reduce chaos, and help make employment sustainable for all parents, most especially for single mothers.

promote family-friendly workplace policies that have been successfully implemented by companies locally and nationally. We loved that idea and this report is our response.

Throughout 2017, we contacted a diverse group of employers and requested they share policies of which they are most proud and that most benefit their workers. We received responses from 15 employers, including large and small companies, local government, and the **University of Alabama at Birmingham**.

We've also researched national models. The demand for paid parental leave, earned sick leave, flexible child care, a living wage, and related benefits—practically unheard of for low-to-middle-income workers a generation ago—is stronger than ever. Often we associate these policies with places like Seattle with a \$15/hour minimum wage or New York City where paid sick leave is required by law. However, states including Arkansas, West Virginia, and Nebraska have also passed laws raising minimum wage above the

federally required \$7.25/hour. Arizona, Philadelphia, and Chicago are among the 39 jurisdictions in the U.S. with paid sick leave laws.

Large national employers are also adding paid parental leave policies. At American Express, both mothers and fathers can take up to 20 weeks following the birth or adoption of a child. Furniture chain IKEA provides 16 weeks. Soft drink giant Coca-Cola offers six weeks.

This report examines in greater detail the workplace policies most helpful for working parents, as provided by Birmingham employers who responded to our survey. It also provides context as to how these policies can make a difference for low-wealth workers, single mothers, and other working parents. After all, today's economy is increasingly fueled by the hard work of mothers. More than 20,500 families in Jefferson County alone are led by a single, working mother, nearly double the number of families with a working father and a stay-at-home mother. For another 27,800 families, both the father and mother are employed.

Workplace policies that support mothers and families support our workforce—in this generation and the next.



Leslie H. Carlisle

Leslie H. Carlisle,
Chair, Board of Directors
The Women's Fund of
Greater Birmingham

Alabama Power

Highlights

Alabama Power starts employees at salaries above the federal minimum wage, provides corporate sponsorship of quality child care, and offers 12 weeks of paid maternity leave.

Strong supports for parents

- 12 weeks of paid maternity leave for mothers following birth or adoption of a child.
- Additional 80 hours of paid leave for mothers and fathers following birth or adoption of a child.

Family illness hours

- Employees receive up to 40 hours of leave per year to use toward the care of an ill family member.

Child care supports

- Employees can participate in a Dependent Care Tax Saver Account. This allows employees to set aside money from their paychecks, before taxes, to pay for eligible child care expenses.

Wages

- Alabama Power's entry-level pay exceeds the federal minimum wage.



WAGES

In the first *Clearing the Path* report, single, working mothers identified higher wages as the single factor that would make the most difference in their lives. Many of those women worked extra hours or second jobs to pay the bills. Child care swallowed up 39% of their pay on average. Unquestionably, low wages take a toll on mothers and their children.

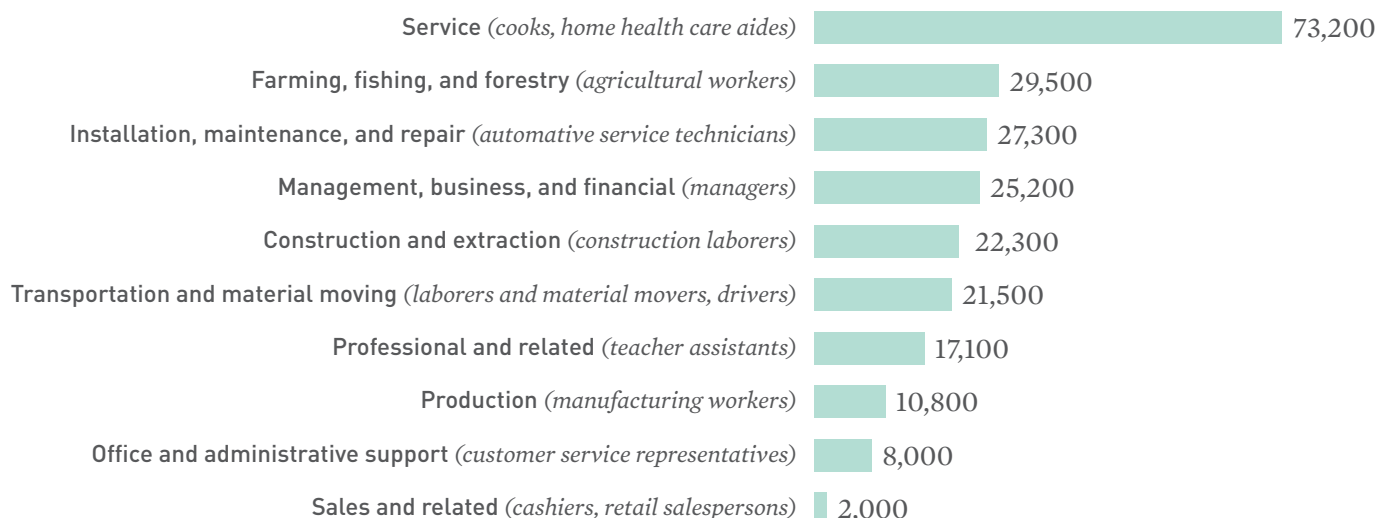
An analysis of the numbers is eye-opening: A mother employed full time earning minimum wage—or even slightly above—earns less than the federal poverty level. Specifically, at minimum wage, a full-time worker earns \$15,080 annually before taxes. The federal poverty level is \$20,420 for a family of three, thus minimum wage employment results in deep poverty—income 26% below the poverty line for a mother with two children—despite this mother’s hard work. Near-minimum wages of \$8 or \$9/hour are still not enough to inch a family out of poverty.

A mother employed full time earning minimum wage—or even slightly above—earns less than the federal poverty level.

Many employers are surprised to learn that, even with \$11-12/hour pay, their employees qualify for government benefits to make ends meet. Food assistance is the most common. SNAP—Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—is designed to support the working poor, thus many families with a parent earning less than \$25,000 per year qualify, though their benefit is less than families with lower incomes.

Top Alabama Occupations in which Workers Rely on Federal Assistance to Feed Their Families

By number of workers per occupation receiving assistance



Source: [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)

Beyond Minimum Wage in Birmingham

Although federal minimum wage has remained stagnant at \$7.25/hour since 2009, in 29 states and 40 localities, American workers are covered by higher minimums set by state and local governments.¹ The State of Alabama has not set a higher wage so the minimum has remained the same for 8 years. Nonetheless, most employers we contacted have realized the benefits of higher entry-level pay, including greater retention and a more engaged workforce.

For example, in 2015, Ascension Health, parent company to **St. Vincent's Health System**, adopted an \$11/hour starting wage, which it refers to as a “socially just” minimum wage. Ascension president and CEO Anthony Tersigni said at the time, “we should...set an example for other organizations, particularly other healthcare providers, in advocating for a fair and just minimum wage.”²

Raising the Floor:

A Sample of Employers Who Start Employees Above Minimum Wage

- [Alabama Power](#)
- [American Cast Iron Pipe Co. \(ACIPCO\)](#)
- [Blue Cross and Blue Shield](#)
- [Brasfield & Gorrie](#)
- [City of Birmingham](#)
- [Jefferson County Commission](#)
- [Mayer Electric Supply](#)
- [McWane, Inc.](#)
- [Protective Life Insurance Company](#)
- [Regions Financial \(by end of 2018\)](#)
- [University of Alabama at Birmingham](#)

“I was able to get a car.”

How \$11/hour made a difference for one family

Antonerria Davis always found a way to get to her job in Patient Transport at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), often riding with her mother who also worked at the hospital. But once her salary increased from \$9/hour to \$11/hour, Antonerria could finally afford her own car and the flexibility it provides. Antonerria, 23, has worked in Patient Transport, moving patients throughout the sprawling UAB complex for a year and a half.

Until her pay increase, she often worked side jobs at her aunt's hair salon or at a car wash. “But now, I don't have to do that, unless I really want to,” she says. The pay raise means she has more time with Darian, her 3-year-old son. She is also considering taking advantage of UAB's program offering free college tuition to employees. Antonerria has a high school diploma and loves being in an environment where so many highly-educated professionals work hard. “Working here has made me want to go back to school,” she says.



Antonerria Davis and her son, Darian, have more time to spend together now that she no longer must work a second job to make ends meet.

There is strong evidence that for families with young children with annual incomes of \$25,000 or less, a \$3,000 increase during the years of early childhood yields a 17 percent increase in adult earnings for children.

American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO)

Highlights

ACIPCO offers up to eight weeks of paid maternity leave; an award winning wellness program including on-site physical therapy; and entry-level hourly pay 2.5 times the federal minimum wage.

Strong supports for parents and child care

- 8 weeks of paid maternity leave for new mothers
- Employees are able to participate in a Dependent Care Tax Saver Account (also known as flexible spending account or FSA). This allows employees to set aside pre-tax dollars to pay for expenses such as child care and day camps.
- The manufacturing division works day and night shifts, so parents can request to be placed on second or third shift, which gives a two-parent family the flexibility to coordinate child care.
- ACIPCO/Eagan Foundation helps employees' children/stepchildren with college expenses; awards \$2,000 scholarships to 10 to 12 deserving recipients each year.

Wellness program

Employee wellness program offers at no cost:

- Access to health and wellness team, including registered dietitians and exercise instructors; one-on-one wellness center;
- Up to \$800/year in financial incentives for setting and achieving health goals, plus a one-time advancement award up to \$200 for taking your health to the next level;
- On-site physical therapy and rehabilitation clinic.
- Wellness Center

Continuing education support

- Tuition reimbursement up to \$5,400 per year for employees completing job-related college or trade school courses.

Wages

- ACIPCO's starting pay is \$18.12/hour.



[Read Delilah's story on page 16.](#)

PAID SICK LEAVE

Among the mothers we surveyed in *Clearing the Path*, 74% reported being the primary caregiver when their children were sick or otherwise could not attend school or child care. Indeed, most working parents have been there: A stomach bug strikes your child at 3 a.m. A toddler's 101-degree fever just won't go down. Or, as Alabama experienced during the winter of 2018, the flu epidemic comes knocking at your door. Fortunate parents have a spouse or generous relative for these crises. The rest, including most single mothers, sacrifice their own limited sick time, often giving up part of a paycheck. After inevitably contracting the same illness, they trudge back into work sick, tissues and hand sanitizer at the ready.

Numerous employers have realized this model is not sustainable or healthy for their workers. **Alabama Power**, for example, offers full-time time employees 40 hours of paid family illness hours to use toward the care of a family member, in addition to traditional paid sick leave, which may be used for their own illness or injury, for medical appointments, or for care of a family member. **Regions Financial** offers up to 12 days of sick leave, which includes family sick days.

Protective Life Insurance Company also offers flexible paid sick leave of 18 to 28 days per year depending on employee classification and tenure. "People can utilize this bank of pay for any reason including when they need to stay home for standard illnesses or to care for a loved one who is ill," Protective Life explained in its survey. The company goes a step farther with an on-site clinic open to all employees free of charge. Here's how the company explained the clinic:

"We staff it with a nurse practitioner. A nurse practitioner can prescribe medicines. Many employees with chronic conditions like diabetes visit the nurse practitioner weekly. Some get weekly shots. Other than that, it is the usual—colds, flus, rashes, sprains. Think doc-in-the-box onsite. It is a win-win for us and employees. It is cheaper for employees than going to their doctor. They don't have to take off much time from work."



Royal Cup Coffee and Tea responds to a similar need with a medical bus from Brookwood Baptist Health System. Staffed with a physician, this mobile health center visits Royal Cup every six to eight weeks offering basic medical services and urgent care at the same cost as a typical doctor's office (i.e. copayment or other out of pocket expenses).

University of Alabama at Birmingham provides up to 10 days per year of sick leave that can be used to care for oneself or a sick family member. But the university has also recognized that 10 days is not always enough and offers some flexibility. Those benefits include a "sick leave bank" that allows employees who may be short on available leave to request additional sick time. Also available is a "sick leave donation process." Employees with surplus sick leave can donate hours directly to a co-worker. These policies have reduced turnover as the majority of employees who use the sick bank have returned to work following an extended illness.



Sick Days:

Sample Area Employers Who Offer Paid Sick Leave to Care for Sick Family Member.

- [Alabama Power](#)
- [Baker Donelson](#)
- [City of Birmingham](#)
- [EBSCO Industries](#)
- [Jefferson County Commission](#)
- [Mayer Electric Supply](#)
- [McWane, Inc.](#)
- [Protective Life Insurance Company](#)
- [Regions Financial](#)
- [University of Alabama at Birmingham](#)

EBSCO Industries

Highlights

EBSCO offers six weeks of fully paid maternity leave, eight weeks for Caesarean deliveries, plus a sick leave policy that allows for the care of family members.

Paid maternity leave

- Six to eight weeks of fully paid maternity leave following birth of a child.

Adoption support

- The company reimburses expenses related to an adoption, up to \$3,000 for a child, up to \$5,000 in the case of a special needs child. Eligible expenses include: agency and placement fees, legal fees, medical expenses of birth mother and child, immigration and immunization.

Paid sick time

- Employees earn four hours of paid sick leave per month, which may be used for their own illness, a relative's illness, mental illness, dealing with effects of domestic violence, and in some cases, caregiving.

Flex time

- Many managers permit some flexible work schedules, and most allow time off to attend children's events.

Child care supports

- Employees are able to participate in a Dependent Care Assistance Plan. This allows employees to set aside money from their paychecks, before taxes, to pay for child care expenses.

Baker Donelson

Highlights

Baker Donelson offers attorneys up to 16 weeks paid parental leave following the birth of a child, as well as subsidized backup child care for emergencies.

Strong supports for new parents

- 16 weeks of paid parental leave following birth or adoption of a child.

Family illness hours

- Employees may use sick leave to care for a sick relative. In addition, up to 10 days of sick leave may be carried over to the next year.

Child care supports

- Employees can access up to 10 days per year of subsidized backup child care when regular child care falls through, either in a home or through a Bright Horizons-affiliated center. Baker Donelson pays Bright Horizons an annual fee to access child care and employees have access to a nationwide network of providers when a need arises.

- Corporate sponsor of The Harris Early Learning Center, a licensed and NAEYC-accredited child development center in downtown Birmingham, which gives their employees greater access to openings at the center.
- Employees are able to participate in a Dependent Care Tax Saver Account. This allows employees to set aside money from their paychecks, before taxes, to pay for expenses such as child care and day camps.

Flex time

- Adjusting work schedules may be allowed, if agreed to by direct supervisors. Depending on the position of the employee, he/she may also be allowed to work from home on a limited basis.

Wages

- Entry-level wage exceeds the federal minimum wage.

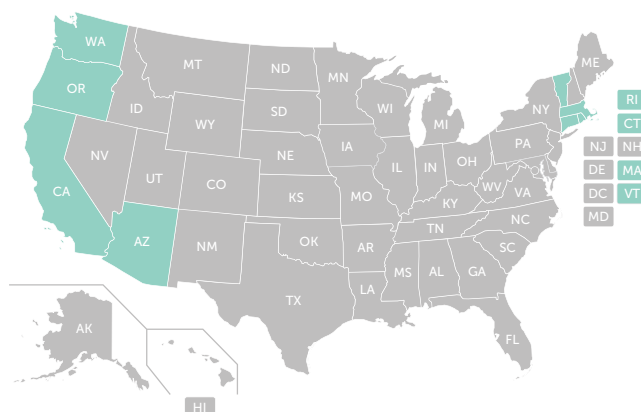


Elsewhere in the country, an ever-increasing number of workers are earning paid sick leave under newly-enacted state and local laws. Altogether, 40 jurisdictions have laws requiring employers to provide paid sick leave to their workers.⁶



According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a record number of private-sector employees—68% or 79 million people—now have access to paid sick leave.

- *States with sick leave laws*
- *States without sick leave laws*



- Reduced emergency room visits – employees with no paid sick leave rely more heavily on the ER, costing public health insurance programs an estimated \$1.1 billion annually.
- Lost productivity – workers forced to return to the job while sick can be unproductive, less healthy, and spread illness to other workers. Ample time off for medical care and recovery solves all three costly issues.
- Studies have found that supportive sick leave reduces turnover, saving employers' money.⁸

St. Vincent's Health System

Highlights

St. Vincent's offers a starting wage of \$11/hour, plus tuition assistance when employees choose to further their education.

Paid time off

- All employees receive paid time off in varying amounts.

Educational assistance

- Employees are encouraged to pursue education and are reimbursed for tuition costs, once employed at least six months.

Bereavement leave

- Full-time employees receive three paid shifts of leave following a death in the family.

Wages

- Lowest starting wage is \$11/hour, well over the federal minimum.



City of Birmingham

Highlights

The City of Birmingham's starting salary of \$10.71 is well above minimum wage. In addition, employees receive assistance with sick child daycare, and generous earned sick leave.

Sick leave and family illness hours

- All regular employees accrue paid sick leave at the rate of 8 hours per month of service (more for firefighters). Sick leave may be carried forward year to year with no maximum amount.
- There are 12 paid days of sick leave for family.

Child care supports

- Reduced rates through Hugs and Kisses child care for employees whose children are too sick to attend school, but not sick enough to go to the doctor.
- Tuition assistance for parents to enroll their children into Harris Early Learning Center, a licensed and NAEYC-accredited child development center in downtown Birmingham, which gives their employees greater access to openings at the center and reduced employee costs.
- Employees may send their children to the city's summer camp at a reduced price.

Wages

- Birmingham employees are all paid above the minimum wage. Building service worker salary starts at \$10.71/hour; refuse collector starts at \$12.36 and laborer starts at \$11.02/hour.

PAID SICK LEAVE

Workers Who Need the Most, Get the Least

Unfortunately, the benefits of paid sick leave are not equally distributed. While 93 percent of management, business, and financial professionals received paid sick leave in 2017, only 46 percent of lower-paid service employees, such as child care teachers, health aids, and retail clerks, received the same.⁹

The disproportionate lack of earned paid sick leave is especially harmful for these low-wage workers because losing 2-3 days of income due to illness can be the equivalent of a family's water bill or weekly groceries.

Researcher Dana Friedman, Founder of the Early Years Institute, found that single, working mothers of children under age 6—the group most likely to need paid, sick leave—was also the group least likely to have access to this benefit.¹⁰

Alabama has no statewide paid sick law and in 2016 the Legislature passed a law preventing municipalities from passing their own.

Although the Uniform Minimum Wage and Right to Work Act received the most attention for striking down Birmingham's \$10.10 minimum wage, the law also prevents localities from enacting a variety of workplace benefits, including sick leave. Thus, for the

health of workers, their families, and even customers, it is heavily incumbent upon employers to address this critical need. Research shows that in Alabama, approximately 672,000 workers cannot earn a single paid sick day to heal from surgery, care for a sick child, or recover from a contagious illness, such as flu or pneumonia. More than 145,000 of these employees work in restaurants, where they are in frequent contact with food, creating significant health risks for the public.¹¹

At the federal level, the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516) would establish a paid sick day standard, allowing workers to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year to be used to recover from their own illnesses, access preventive care, or provide care to a sick family member. The bill was introduced in March 2017 and is currently in committee.¹²



Headline Capture from AL.com · Photo Credit: AP Photo/Gregory Bull

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Nearly 25 years ago, the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) permitted mothers to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave following the birth of a child. The FMLA also expanded job protections for workers who need time off following serious illness or to care for a sick relative.

Since then, a study conducted by the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management found that the numbers of college-educated mothers who took FMLA leave increased significantly, while the numbers of less-educated mothers taking leave grew some, but not nearly as much. Importantly, researchers have documented that women who are able to take the

full 12 weeks experience better birth outcomes and reduced infant mortality.¹³ Unfortunately those improved outcomes do not extend to low-income mothers and single mothers, most of whom cannot afford weeks without a paycheck.¹⁴

None of this is groundbreaking. As any new parent knows, those first months of parenting are all-consuming. Time to bond, learn and meet the needs of your infant, and establish routines are critical for everyone's wellbeing. That's why conversations in both boardrooms and state capitols are shifting to include paid leave in the policy, leveling the playing field for lower-income families.

15 Years of Loyalty and Counting

Delilah Landrum started working at AMERICAN right out of high school. Fifteen years and two children later, she remains with the company, in part because of benefits that allow her to balance work and parenting. "My plan was to get out there and work, then go back to school immediately," she said. "But this job is hard to walk away from."

Delilah, 34, is married and lives in Vincent. She noted three specific benefits that have kept the job attractive for her. Paid parental leave permitted her to take 8 weeks off following the birth of each child and receive pay for 6.5 hours per day while on leave. Her children are now 6 and 9, so AMERICAN was ahead of the curve on paid family leave. Delilah has also been able to move up in the company. She's worked as a security officer, in division offices including Human Resources, and now she schedules and orders raw materials

for the ductile iron pipe plant, spending most of her days on the manufacturing floor. Finally, she is able to go back to school after all.

Thanks to AMERICAN's tuition-reimbursement program, she takes online classes at the University of Alabama's Life Track Program, and her company reimburses up to \$5,400 per year for approved courses of study at accredited technical schools, colleges and universities.



Delilah Landrum,
15-year employee at
AMERICAN Cast Iron
Pipe Company, wife
and mother of two
young children

Including All Families

California responded to these unequal opportunities by enacting a statewide Paid Family Leave (PFL) program in 2004. New parents and caregivers with seriously ill relatives can take up to six weeks of leave at 55% of normal pay – funded through employee payroll taxes. In addition, new parents can take another four to six weeks through the state’s short term disability insurance system. Research showed the positive effects were “largest for the least advantaged mothers (those who are unmarried, minorities, and with low education levels).”¹⁵

Researchers also found no evidence that employers were adversely affected: “Using data on nearly all California employers that ever existed between January 2000 and December 2014, we find no evidence that firm turnover or wage costs rise when leave-taking rates rise. In fact, the average firm has a lower per worker wage bill and a lower turnover rate today than it did before PFL was introduced.”¹⁶

Locally, strategic employers are realizing that, while the job protections of the FMLA were a strong first step, more is needed. Employers in multiple sectors: manufacturing, health, legal services, and more now offer paid parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child. The typical benefit offered by Birmingham-area employers who responded to our survey and offer a paid parental leave policy is between 6 and 12 weeks of fully paid leave for the primary caregiver and 2 weeks of paid leave for an employee who is the non-primary caregiver.

Baker Donelson, **Maynard Cooper**, **Balch & Bingham** and **Bradley** provide 16 weeks of paid parental leave to their attorneys —the most generous policies we found. Baker Donelson reported that since it revised this policy within the last 2 years, more employees have been using the maximum amount of leave allowed. At the **University of Alabama at**

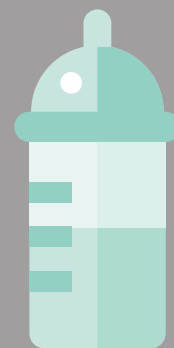
Birmingham (UAB), more than 500 parental leaves were granted the first year of the policy. “Some employees have chosen to remain at UAB because of this benefit,” said UAB Chief Human Resources Officer Alesia Jones.

Researchers found no evidence that firm turnover or wage costs rise when workers take paid parental leave.

Healthy moms, happy babies, better workers

Greater Birmingham Employers Offering Paid Parental Leave Following Birth or Adoption

- [American Cast Iron Pipe Co.](#)
- [Alabama Power](#)
- [Baker Donelson](#)
- [Balch & Bingham](#)
- [Bradley](#)
- [Brasfield & Gorrie](#)
- [EBSCO Industries](#)
- [Mayer Electric Supply](#)
- [Maynard Cooper](#)
- [McWane, Inc.](#)
- [Protective Life](#)
- [Royal Cup Coffee and Tea](#)
- [University of Alabama at Birmingham](#)



Regions Financial Corporation

Child care supports

- Provides corporate funding to Today Care, a child care center that offers transitional and backup child care to Regions' employees at lower-than-market rates. Transitional care is offered for newborns or recently adopted infants up to 24 weeks. Backup care is available for when a family's regular child care or school is unavailable, such as school holidays or teacher in-service days.
- Regions is a corporate sponsor of The Harris Early Learning Center, a NAEYC-accredited child development center in downtown Birmingham. Accordingly, Regions employees receive discounted tuition and priority placement for enrollment.

Wages

- Regions announced in January that starting wages would be raised to \$15/hour by December 2018.

Time off for parents

- Hourly employees may be excused up to three times per year to attend meetings at their children's school.

Family illness hours

- Employees receive up to 12 days of sick leave per year and may use these hours toward care of an ill family member.

Financial extras

- Eligible employees purchasing or refinancing a home can receive a 5 for 5 loan—a \$5,000, interest-free second mortgage, available to qualifying associates to help cover some costs of buying a home. A portion (\$1,000) of the loan is paid by Regions each year the employee remains employed by the company.
- Children of employees at certain income levels can receive scholarships of up to \$7,000 per year.
- Covers adoption expenses not reimbursed by state or private agencies up to \$3000 for the adoption of special needs children and up to \$1000 for expenses related to other adoptions that are not otherwise reimbursed.
- Associate Home Ownership Program offers monetary assistance to associates for home purchases. (This benefit must be in conjunction with a Regions approved mortgage loan.)

Tuition reimbursement

- Tuition reimbursement to full-time and part-time associates after 90 days of employment. The benefit is applicable to all undergraduate degree programs within an approved college/university's school of business, up to \$5,000 per year.

University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)

Highlights

UAB offers a flexible, alternative work schedule, as well as 10 days of paid leave which can be rolled over from year to year.

Paid parental leave

- Four work weeks of paid parental leave to eligible employees during the first six months following birth or adoption.

Child care supports

- An on-site child development center, which is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Employees save 10% on tuition for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years at Birmingham area KinderCare Learning Center locations.

Paid sick leave

- Full-time employees accrue up to 10 days per year in sick leave, which can be rolled over from year to year.
- Sick time may be used for anyone who resides in the same household as the employee.

Sick donation pool

- Provides a source of paid leave for employees who have exhausted available accrued benefit time as a result of significant illness or injury to include access to the sick time donation pool.

Flexible work schedules

- Offers alternative work schedules—working either a 10-month assignment or a reduced schedule of 32 hour per week.
- UAB also offers telecommuting work arrangements.

Tuition reimbursement

- The Educational Assistance Program is a benefit available to all full-time regular employees. An employee must have completed at least six months of continuous service to be eligible for the benefit.

Wages

- The minimum wage for regular employees is \$11 per hour.



PAID FAMILY LEAVE

National employers such as Bank of America, Twitter, Microsoft, Ikea, Merrill Lynch, American Express, and Ernst & Young all offer more than 12 weeks of paid family leave, also called maternity leave, with some providing as much as 5 months. Chobani, Campbell's Soup, and Coca-Cola offer six weeks paid leave.

Despite the diligent efforts of these family-friendly employers, overall, only 13% of private sector workers in the U.S. have access to paid family leave, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Most with access worked in management or professional sectors. For

lower-paying retail and service workers, only 7% could access paid parental leave.¹⁷

One recent study found that one in four new mothers in the United States return to work just 10 days after childbirth. Often, a corporation's much-heralded and generous paid family leave is only available to white collar employees in corporate offices – not to the hourly employees who comprise the majority of the company's workforce. Put simply, the people who most need paid family leave are the least likely to have it.¹⁸

Protective Life Insurance Company

Highlights

Protective Life offers an on-site health clinic staffed by a nurse practitioner, as well as flex time accommodations such as job sharing.

Wages

- Starting wage of \$15/hour announced in 2018.

Personal and family illness hours

- Offering 18 to 28 days per year of paid time off depending on employee classification and tenure. People can utilize this bank of pay for any reason, including their own illness, to care for a loved one who is ill, or to participate in family or school events.

Family leave

- Offering a short-term disability policy for serious illness or the birth or adoption of a child that supports an employee at either 65% of pay or 100% of pay depending on tenure with the company.

Flex time

- Limited flex time, including the ability to work from home or adjust schedules, is permitted as long as business needs are met.
- Protective has a job sharing policy permitting two employees to work reduced hours while still providing full job coverage
- Possible schedules include all mornings/ all afternoons; one week off, one week on; three days one week, two the next.

On-site health clinic and fitness facility

- On-site clinic staffed by a nurse practitioner allows easy access to care for employees with chronic conditions and treatment for common ailments such as colds, rashes, and sprains, alleviating the need to take time off for lengthy doctor's appointments.
- On-site fitness facility offering massage therapy, fitness equipment, personal training and classes such as spin, yoga, and Zumba.

Employers benefit from paid family leave as well. The U.S. Labor Department reports that, “Paid maternity leave increases worker retention and reduces turnover, saving businesses significant costs associated with replacing employees. After California and New Jersey enacted paid family leave benefits, most businesses in those states reported positive or neutral experiences and few negative effects.”¹⁹

One recent study found that one in four new mothers in the United States returns to work just 10 days after childbirth.

Jefferson County Commission

Highlights

Jefferson County pays over 75% of the cost of medical benefits, allowing employees to take advantage of the rich benefit plan; employees receive a minimum of 12 days per year of paid sick leave.

Wages

- Jefferson County’s starting pay is \$9-10 per hour.

Paid leave policy

- Employees accrue vacation and sick days within 90 days of employment, specifically:

Vacation accrual

- 8 hours per month from 0 to 12 years of employment
- 12 hours per month from 12 – 25 years of employment
- 16 hours per month at more than 25 years of employment

Sick accrual

- 8 hours per month (1 day per month)
- Sick days may be used to care for sick family members
- Unused sick day roll over from year to year

Vacation leave bank

- Employees may access additional paid leave in return for doing a one-time donation of 8 hours after one-year probation. Paid leave from the Vacation Leave Bank is only used to cover employee illness.

Single + 1 health plan

- Reduced cost to employees with only one covered dependent in health plan, approximately \$78 per month savings from previous family plan.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Paid Parental Leave Laws: Everywhere Except America

Given the clear benefits of paid time off for parents to bond with their new babies, not surprisingly every developed country with a market economy has a paid parental leave law—except the United States. Nations as small as New Zealand, Sweden, Chile, and Estonia all offer at least two months and some more than a year. The goal is both to promote healthy bonding between babies and new parents, but also to keep

women in the workforce, which improves GDP. In fact, of the 193 countries in the United Nations, only a handful including Suriname, New Guinea, and the U.S. have no national paid parental leave policy.²⁰

Jody Heyman, a researcher at the UCLA World Policy Analysis Center, told an NPR interviewer in October, 2016 that most of these countries are motivated

McWane, Inc.

Highlights

McWane's starting salary of \$12.55/hour for first shift and \$13.09/hour for second shift is significantly higher than many local employers. The company's attendance policy also provides options for work-life balance.

Flexibility for parents

- Hourly workers have the flexibility to address children's needs in a number of ways: absences related to child care emergencies, sick children, graduations, and court appearances related to children are all excused absences.

Earned time offs

- Employees can earn a total of 320 hours of paid leave each year, including 40 hours of earned paid leave for good attendance.
- Paid short-term disability is also available for 12 weeks, consistent with the Family Medical Leave Act.

Child care supports

- Employees are able to participate in a Dependent Care Tax Saver Account. This allows employees to set aside money from their paychecks, before taxes, to pay for expenses such as child care.

Wages

- Starting pay of \$12.55/hour for first shift and \$13.09 for second shift is 75% higher than minimum wage. Additionally, hourly team members are bumped up 80 cents/hour after 90 days; after 180 days they can bid to move into higher-wage positions.
- After six months on the job, hourly workers earn \$13.67/hour for first shift and \$14.21/hour for second shift.

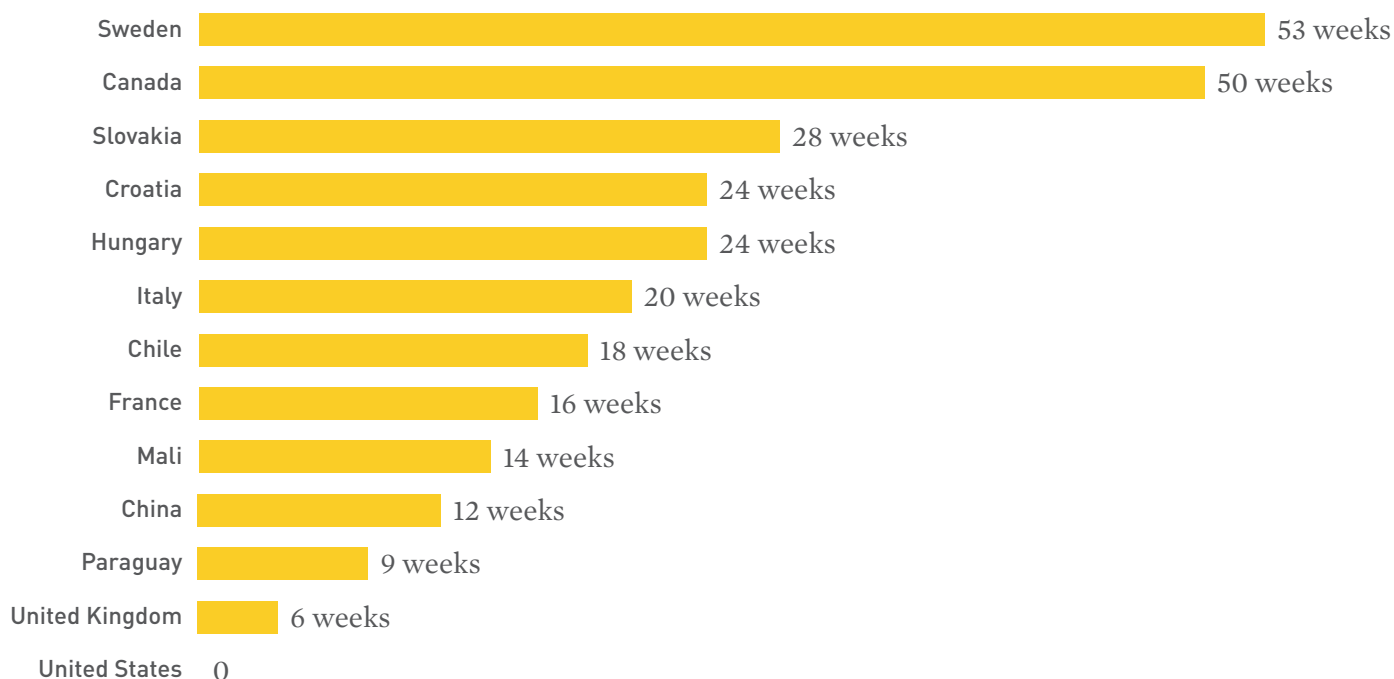
by both common sense for parents and economic benefits. “In most countries, families rely on income from both the mom and dad,” she said. “Families can’t afford to have a lengthy period without income for one of them. At the same time, newborns absolutely need parental care. So this being a fundamental piece of social insurance or what governments do as part of their social security really is common sense. The

second piece that drives countries I’ve spoken to is finance ministers from around the world who say one of their greatest sources of success economically is getting women into the workforce in equal numbers,” Heymann said.²¹

Every developed country with a market economy has a paid parental leave law—except the United States.

Paid Maternity Leave

How do nations compare when it comes to government mandated paid leave?



Source: [Women and Tech](#)

SUPPORT FOR CHILD CARE

Our first *Clearing the Path* survey found that 55% of single mothers lost a job or promotion because they took time off related to their children. And 34% of business and community leaders who attended our *Clearing the Path* breakfast suggested that The Women's Fund advocate for more corporate investment in quality child care. Downtown Birmingham already has a successful model that could be replicated.

Twenty-five years ago, [Alabama Power](#) CEO Elmer Harris and his wife, Glenda, recognized the need for more quality child care in downtown Birmingham—and the necessity of corporate dollars to make it happen.

“Elmer was the catalyst to go to business leaders and say, ‘Why don’t we pool our resources and develop a world-class center down the street where our employees can have priority?’” explained Robbie Roberts, executive director of the Elmer and Glenda Harris Early Learning Center, now a nationally accredited child care center serving 200 children.

“Why don’t we pool our resources and develop a world-class center down the street where our employees can have priority?”

More than 35 entities—corporations, law firms, the [City of Birmingham](#), and nonprofits—initially invested in the center, sponsoring spaces at a cost of \$25,000 each over 10 years. After 10 years, the building was paid for, and the program continues to thrive thanks in part to continued corporate support. Among employers we surveyed, sponsorship of spaces at Harris was a common way to help support their employees’ child care needs.



Children attending high-quality child care at PreSchool Partners, a nonprofit center that focuses on school readiness for Birmingham children.

Here's why the Harris Early Learning Center model works so well:

- Employers cover \$1,000 per space per year, reducing employee costs for high-quality care.
- Employees from sponsoring companies receive priority on the waiting list, giving those parents a better chance at getting highly sought-after infant spaces and returning to the workforce with assurances their babies are in safe, loving care. Some employers reserve their spaces for lower-paid staff.
- Auburn University, which helped develop the center, now owns the program. Executive staff are Auburn faculty; a teacher holding a child development degree is in every classroom.

State tax credits for employer-sponsored child care

Since 2000, Georgia has provided generous tax credits to employers who add on-site child care or who subsidize employees' child care costs. Specifically, employers who purchase or build qualified child care facilities are eligible to receive Georgia income tax credits equal to 100 percent of the cost of construction. The credit for the cost of construction is spread over 10 years—10 percent each year. Importantly, the child care facility must be licensed by the state. Additionally, employers who provide or sponsor child care for employees are eligible for a credit against Georgia income tax equal to 75 percent of the employer's direct costs.

Source: [Georgia Department of Economic Development](#).

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama on-site child care center

Parents who work at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama (BCBSAL) have the benefit of nationally accredited on-site child care—at a cost that is less than many high-quality child care centers—thanks to the company's subsidy. Blue Cross Blue Shield benefits as well. “It is a retention tool,” explains Elizabeth Hamlin, Director of Associate Services. BCBSAL contracts with Bright Horizons, a national child care company, to operate the center for children ages 6 weeks to 6 years. Currently 120 children are enrolled at the center that is open from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. A separate section of the building even offers care to mildly ill children who cannot attend their regular school or child care center. “We want to provide solutions that attract and retain a diverse and quality workforce,” says Hamlin.



SUPPORT FOR CHILD CARE

Dana Friedman, founder of the Early Years Institute and a national researcher on workplace supports for parents, has observed that employer-sponsored child care, such as The Harris Center or Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, is typically higher quality than many centers in a community. That's because the company subsidizes the difference between what quality costs and what parents can afford to pay. The higher the subsidy, the more employees at all income levels can afford to use the center.²²

The Harris Center is a prime example of how corporate and government investment in quality child care benefits working parents and the employers who need parents to keep businesses running. Yet more

than two decades after Elmer and Glenda Harris first identified these needs, more mothers have entered the workforce, and affordable child care remains the greatest struggle for working, single mothers.

Our research into current benefits offered by employers revealed three promising models, in addition to the Harris Center:

- On-site child care: **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama** and the **University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)** offer on-site child care. Employees know their children are close by and drop off/pick up is convenient.
- Corporate funding for transitional and backup child care: **Regions Financial** provides corporate funding to Today Care, which offers transitional and backup child care to Regions' employees at lower-than-market rates. Care is offered for infants up to 24 weeks, the age for which there are often long waiting lists at most regular centers. Backup care is available for when a family's regular child care or school is unavailable, such as school holidays or teacher in-service days.
- Care for Sick Children: **Children's of Alabama** provides emergency child care for mildly ill children on site. Children's "Near and Dear" on-site center also offers care for children 3 months to 12 years whose regular school is closed. The **City of Birmingham** offers tuition assistance to Hugs and Kisses, a child care center for mildly ill children. **Blue Cross and Blue Shield** has a child care center for mildly ill children, which the company subsidizes.



Mayer Electric Supply

Prolonged illness benefit

- In addition to regular sick leave of up to 9 days per year, associates are eligible for 3 weeks paid prolonged illness leave, which can be used following the birth of a child.

Child care supports

- Associates may participate in a Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account. This program allows associates to set aside money from their paychecks, before taxes, to pay for expenses such as child care, or for elder care.

Time off for community service

- Associates receive 12 hours of paid leave for community service, which can include volunteering at their children's school.

Health

- Employer contribution of \$750 to \$1,500 to associates' Health Savings Account.

Education

- Tuition reimbursement benefit provides loans for associates to pursue undergraduate or associate's degrees of benefit to their careers. The loans are provided at the beginning of the course, then forgiven once the course is completed.
- For associates' children, Mayer offers the Collat Scholarship Program. Scholarships are awarded to children of associates with at least 12 months service. Since 1999, over 300 scholarships have been awarded totaling over \$470,000.

Royal Cup Coffee and Tea

Highlights

Royal Cup offers eight weeks of paid maternity leave. The company has sourced a medical bus, staffed by a physician, to come to the corporate headquarters every 6-8 weeks.

Paid maternity leave

- 8 weeks of fully paid maternity leave for mothers following birth of a child, plus additional four weeks unpaid, but with job protection.

Educational assistance

- GED Program which is 100% free of charge to the employees.

Child care supports

- Employees are able to participate in a Flexible Spending Account Plan. This allows employees to set aside money from their paychecks, before taxes, to pay for expenses such as child care and day camps.

On-site medical care

- A medical bus from Brookwood Baptist Health System staffed with a physician comes to Royal Cup every 6-8 weeks offering basic medical services and urgent care at the same cost as a typical doctor's office (i.e. copayment or other out of pocket expenses).

Employee emergency fund

- After the 2011 tornadoes, Royal Cup began an Employee Emergency Fund that helps coworkers experiencing hardships. An internal committee accepts applications and strives to return to the employee in need within 24 hours.

THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE:

How investments in employees benefit the bottom line

A wealth of academic research supports our theory that family-friendly policies are smart for business.

Benefits of family-friendly workplace policies:

- reduced absenteeism
- lower turnover
- increased productivity.

MIT Sloan School of Management Professor Zeynep Ton analyzed more than a decade of research and data for her book, *The Good Jobs Strategy: How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs and Boost Profits*.²³ Ton concluded that offering benefits such as fair pay, adequate training, consistent schedules, and opportunities to grow in a company can increase profits. She explored three American retailers that employ these strategies: Costco, Trader Joe's, and QuikTrip.

At Trader Joe's, the starting wage for cashiers is generally \$13.50/hour and full-time employees can earn between \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year, more than twice what some competitors offer.

QuikTrip, a Tulsa, Oklahoma convenience store chain, has appeared on Fortune magazine's list of top 100 companies to work for 11 straight years. QuikTrip's profit per store is more than double the industry average for convenience stores. Further, QuikTrip's 13% turnover rate among full-time employees is substantially lower than the 59% average rate in the top quartile of the convenience store industry. Turnover at Costco is even lower at 4%, and workers start at \$11.50/hour. Higher than average pay certainly helps turnover and morale.

In addition to higher wages, these retailers invest in their workers by:

- Promoting heavily from within: cashiers have a clear route to management;
- Empowering employees to make decisions and come up with ideas to improve the company;
- Cross-training so that when company needs change employees are better equipped to adapt and less likely to leave;
- Operating with slack – having more employees on the job alleviates stress, allows workers to be more gracious and responsive to customers' needs; also allows for consistent scheduling and time off.²⁴

Ton explained in an interview at MIT:

“I wrote this book for managers, executives, and entrepreneurs who want to offer good jobs but don't think it is possible because controlling costs is so important to their business. I also wrote it for people who believe that offering good jobs may be good for individuals and society, but that's not what companies should care about. Companies that follow the good jobs strategy don't do it just to be altruistic. They do it because they found it to be the most sustainable way to provide superior returns to their investors.”

An extensive review of share price reactions to 231 family-friendly human resources policies similarly shows that progressive policies benefit corporations, not just employees. The Industrial and Labor Relations Review study concluded: “Our analyses suggest that work-family human resource decisions positively affect firm value, as shown by share price reaction. Investors, apparently believing that work-family initiatives can benefit firms, respond positively to news of such initiatives, immediately imparting an increase to stock price.” ²⁵

“Companies that follow the good jobs strategy don’t do it just to be altruistic. They do it because they found it to be the most sustainable way to provide superior returns to their investors.”

The study summarized prior research that documented benefits of policies in three general categories, some similar to policies examined here—dependent care, family stress abatement programs, and flexible work arrangements (flex time).



Scholars have found that by announcing a family-friendly policy, an employer reveals its intention “to provide the infrastructure necessary for it to become more efficient” in three different ways:

- Attracting a higher number of workers— and by extension a higher number of better, more qualified workers, increasing production and profits;
- Reducing turnover and improving retention, which cuts back on firms’ training costs and ensures skilled work and quality production;
- Generally improving employee satisfaction and decreasing absenteeism.

The bombshell in this 2004 study was how positively the market responds to these investments in efficiency and quality, particularly for pioneering firms who are the first to announce a beneficial policy.

Announcements of family-friendly policies provided statistically significant increases in share prices for all firms.

But “first announcers”—the pioneers who adopt a family-friendly policy before other companies—gained 75% more than companies that announced the same policy later.

Importantly, previous academic studies had clearly shown the reduced absenteeism, lower turnover, and increased productivity from many family-friendly policies, all of which benefit the corporate bottom line. Now there is also clear evidence that these same policies positively affect shareholder return.

LOCAL TAKEAWAYS

“We have a responsibility to act.”

Locally, improved policies have shown to benefit employers, as well. **UAB’s** starting salary increase “has increased the number of quality applicants in our pools and it has reduced avoidable turnover. So it has had positive effects on our recruitment and retention efforts,” said UAB Chief Human Resources Officer Alesia Jones.

At The Women’s Fund’s 2017 *Clearing the Path* breakfast, corporate leaders agreed that stronger families create a more competitive workforce. The momentum Birmingham is experiencing will not continue absent sustainable employment for women and millennials. But leaders also recognized that their employees had lives and responsibilities outside of work—and the necessary balance starts with family-friendly policies for all workers.

As **Alabama Power** CEO Mark Crosswhite told the group: “In the business community, we have a responsibility to act. Good intentions are not enough.”

Balch & Bingham

Highlights

Balch & Bingham’s maternity leave policy allows attorneys 16 weeks off following birth of a child, which may be taken over 9 months, to help accommodate individual needs or sick children.

Parental leave

- Attorneys may take 16 weeks of paid leave (primary caregiver) for the birth or adoption of a child; 2 weeks for a non-primary caregiver. A portion of the leave may be used intermittently for up to 9 months following the birth or adoption.

Child care supports

- Balch is a corporate sponsor of The Harris Early Learning Center, a licensed and NAEYC-accredited child development center in downtown Birmingham. Accordingly, Balch employees receive

priority placement for children’s enrollment and employees receive discounted tuition.

Flexible time

- Attorneys may work remotely as needed or adjust their work schedule to accommodate sick children, family emergencies, etc. Balch also offer flexible and individually tailored work arrangements allowing attorneys to reduce their work schedule and billable hour arrangement for personal needs.
- Non-attorney employees can elect a work schedule that accommodates their personal needs. Also, non-attorney employees can schedule time off to attend an event and make that time up throughout the week without using vacation time.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

For Employers

- Take one small step. Pick one of the policies in this report you can accomplish and see the difference it makes.
- Conduct a company-wide compensation evaluation to make sure all employees are receiving equal pay for equal work and there is no gender pay gap in your workplace. Be prepared to take action even if it's incremental and the gap is closed over time.
- Offer training and educational support for women in lower-skilled positions that enable them to move into higher-level jobs.
- Partner with nearby employers to start a collaborative child care center with corporate support. The corporate and civic leaders who created the Harris Early Learning Center successfully pioneered this model for Greater Birmingham. That was 25 years ago and the demand for quality child care has exploded since then.
- Acknowledge the value of paid family leave for mothers and newborns, a benefit required in every other developed country in the world. Contact employers in this report who have added generous paid family leave and determine how it could work for your business.
- Improve your starting wage incrementally, for example, in 50 cent steps.

For Government

With HB 174 in 2016, Alabama's Legislature restricted by law the ability of city and county governments to pass family-friendly workplace laws. That statute makes clear that the State has authority over "but not limited to, paid or unpaid leave, vacation, wage, or work schedule." Therefore, the Legislature should use this authority to act. At a minimum, the Legislature should:

- Join 29 other states, including nearby Florida and Arkansas, and raise Alabama's minimum wage above the federally mandated \$7.25/hour.
- Pass a family leave law providing at least six weeks of paid parental leave, as provided by 193 countries.
- Pass a statewide sick leave law, giving workers access to earned, paid sick leave creating a healthier workplace and reducing likelihood of sick employees contaminating customers.
- Investigate strategies successfully implemented by other Southeastern states – such as Georgia's tax credit for employer-sponsored child care— and determine if and how such innovative policies would help industries in Alabama attract and retain the workforces they need.

Brasfield & Gorrie

Highlights

Brasfield & Gorrie offers a flexible schedule for office employees, as well as an incidental illness leave policy which affords employees paid time off for their own illnesses and medical appointments and those of immediate family

Flexible time

- Brasfield & Gorrie offers a condensed workweek for office employees which allows them to work four 9-hour days and one 4-hour day, rather than the typical 8-hour workday.
- Employees who work a five-day week may work hours other than the typical 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. work day.
- Informal policies encourage managers to give employees flexibility to address personal needs such as attending a child's school events, meeting a repairperson or helping an elderly parent.

Incidental illness policy

- The company's incidental illness policy provides employees paid time off to care for immediate family members who are ill, in addition to paid time off due to their own illness or medical appointments.
- Extended illness leave policy pays 100% for first 3 months and 80% for the second 3 months of leave due to an employee's serious illness.

Maternity leave

- The company provides 100% paid leave while the mother is under a doctor's care. Maternity leave may be extended through use of incidental illness policy and vacation time.

Child care supports

- Employees are able to participate in a Dependent Care Tax Saver Account. This allows employees to set aside money from their paychecks, before taxes, to pay for expenses such as child care and day camps.

Wages

- Brasfield & Gorrie's lowest pay varies by location and market, but is generally \$9-\$12/hour for entry-level construction workers.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham would like to thank the following for significant assistance and contributions that have made this report possible:

Marketry, Inc. and Mary Ann Smith-Janans for research assistance

Carla Crowder for research and writing

Cameron Teaney for research assistance

Christine Prichard and Bernard Troncale for photography

The Women's Fund Advocacy Committee for employer interviews:

Lisa Engel

Alesia M. Jones

Peg Monaghan

Mary Ann Smith-Janans

Bisakha "Pia" Sen

Cameron Vowell

Helene Elkus

Val Walton Cornner

Marie Blair

Jacob Smith for editing

Jeanne Jackson, President & CEO,

The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham

Human Resources staff who generously gave their time to respond to our survey at the following employers:

[Alabama Power Company](#)

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