

Hello! My name is Dr Dale Dobrin, I am a pediatrician with the MN Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and with Doctors for Early Childhood, an education and advocacy group. I wish to testify in favor of Paid Family Leave.

As a pediatrician I am aware that many low income families and BIPOC families struggle with the effects of poverty. These effects are most noticeable when income is most compromised, as when parents are unable to work while they recover after giving birth. This results in considerable stress on the young family, which Dr Jack Shonkoff, a pediatrician and Director of the Harvard Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, explains is equivalent to chronic toxic stress. Chronic toxic stress, as in “hand to mouth” existence of families with minimal or no wealth and no income when unable to work, is often transmitted from parent to baby during the critical first 6-12 weeks following a baby’s birth.

A “great start” is thus pre-empted by this stress. The first three years after birth is a time when the brain reaches 80+% of its size and its foundations are set for life. Brains are poised from the moment of birth to learn from the baby’s environment. Recent brain science tells us that a young brain under stress does not grow and develop properly, leading to changes in brain structure which lead to functional impairments from which most children never fully recover. This leads to school struggles, often school failure, mental health and substance abuse issues, poor health, early death and even incarcerations.

Paid leave during the crucial first 6-12 weeks can provide relief from life stresses, leading to the calm nurturing which all babies need and all parents desire. Only 30% of Minnesotans receive any type of paid leave, and the vast majority of low income families receive none. Fifty percent of all births in MN are covered by Medicaid (Medical Assistance). In a time of great surplus, more than nine billion dollars, Minnesota can do better, and must. The MN AAP and Doctors for Early Childhood fully support paid family leave legislation at this time. Because babies and toddlers can’t wait!

As an added bonus, a parent is then able to return to a job waiting, which helps businesses thrive and the economy grow. This is true in all corners of MN, especially in rural communities whose very existence depends on these parents, babies, families, and businesses.

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