

# Colorado family leave plan would benefit small biz

**C**olorado lawmakers frequently say they want to help local small business succeed, and this year they have an opportunity to do just that by enacting a statewide family and medical leave insurance program funded by small employee contributions. Passing just one piece of legislation would go a long way toward leveling the playing field for small firms like mine by lowering employee turnover, boosting productivity and enhancing employee morale — all of which are good for my bottom line.

The Colorado legislature is considering a bill, called the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act, which would provide workers with up to 12 weeks of paid leave per year to bond with a new child or care for a seriously ill family member. A state-administered paid leave insurance program would help make small businesses more competitive by ensuring all workers can receive paid family leave regardless of the size of their com-

pany. Unfortunately, many small businesses like mine often do not have the resources to provide robust benefits such as paid family leave, putting them at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining top talent.

The FMLI Act would quickly benefit my firm. I'm very understanding when my employees need time off for a medical emergency or to take care of sick family members, but that time away does come at a cost to my business. If I offered a paid family and medical leave policy right now, the burden of that plan would be on me, and me alone. With a state policy, however, I would not be responsible for the financial cost of paid family and medical leave insurance, making the impact on my business minimal.



**Tracy  
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This type of program would also go a long way toward helping me retain the best employees. Without it, I face the prospect of losing employees because they had to choose between work or taking care of a family member. What's more, I may lose employees to larger companies that can afford to offer paid leave benefits. Neither option sits well with me.

Many small business owners agree with me that paid family and medical leave isn't just the right thing to do, but it makes good business sense too. In fact, scientific polling conducted on behalf of Small Business Majority found 56 percent of small businesses support paid family and medical leave insurance programs set up at the state level, funded entirely by employee contributions, that would provide employees with a portion of their wages for a limited number of weeks when the employee has a serious illness, has a new baby to care for or needs to care for an ill family member.

Small business owners, myself included, often think of their employees as family, so it makes sense that we support these types of programs. Being able to collect a paycheck while on leave is particularly important for hourly earners like mine who typically don't have robust savings and are financially vulnerable when pay is disrupted. This may force them to make some harsh sacrifices when becoming parents or when facing a family health crisis.

I understand how important it is for employees who need to balance their work and family responsibilities to have reasonable options for doing so — options that also meet the needs of their employers. With that in mind, I wholeheartedly support the FMLI Act. It just makes sense for small businesses.

*Tracy duCharme is the owner of Color Me Mine in Colorado Springs.*

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