

Implementing Paid Family Leave across California: Strengthening Economic Supports to Prevent Multiple Forms of Violence

Practitioners and Advocates Featured:

Alejandra Aguilar

PROGRAM SPECIALIST

[California Partnership to End Domestic Violence](#)



Jenya Cassidy

COALITION DIRECTOR

[California Work & Family Coalition](#)



Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention highlights pathways by which paid parental leave can support reductions in intimate partner violence. Paid parental leave has been shown to reduce financial stress, increase egalitarian parenting practices and promote child/parent bonding. While recognizing that changing economic conditions alone won't prevent all violence, in 2018, the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (the Partnership) identified a strategic opportunity to set a priority around improving economic supports for women and families. Within this, the Partnership decided to focus in on paid family leave, a policy that allows individuals to take paid time off to care for sick family members, or to bond with a new child. The Partnership has strengthened collaborative efforts working with the California Work & Family Coalition who led the campaign to win the first paid family leave law in the state back in 2002 – which was the first of its kind in the country. As the state focuses on implementation, having diverse groups and perspectives at the table remains critical to ensure that those most marginalized have equitable access to the benefits of paid family leave.

UNPACKING THE ISSUES OF ACCESS TO PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Since the California Work & Family Coalition's victory in 2002, eight states have followed suit by also implementing paid leave laws. The California coalition is part of a network of 27 other state coalitions that have active campaigns, and for the first time ever, there is great momentum at the federal level to expand the law even further.

Yet, despite this momentum, the CA Work & Family Coalition has become increasingly aware that while paid leave has been working well for those who take it, there are many barriers in place that prevent others from accessing its benefits. From early studies, the coalition found that immigrants, low-wage workers, and young families were less likely to even know about the benefits in the first place. In the years since paid family leave has passed in California, the Work & Family Coalition has



*A Paid Family Leave training facilitated by the California Work & Family Coalition—
Photo courtesy of Jenya Cassidy*

been partnering with a range of organizations, including the Partnership, to try and remove the barriers that prevent people from taking advantage of the law.

Early on in its implementation, the CA Work & Family Coalition did a study that showed that less than half of registered voters in California knew about paid family leave. In LA, that number was even lower. It also became apparent that for low-wage workers making close to minimum wage, the wage replacement rate offered by paid family leave often was insufficient. Other barriers they identified included an application process that wasn't accessible for all, fear among undocumented immigrants to apply in the first place, limited job protections, and a definition of "family" that wasn't inclusive enough.

ACTIONS TO MAKE PAID FAMILY LEAVE MORE ACCESSIBLE

California Work & Family Coalition and the Partnership are taking action together with their partners to reduce barriers and improve access to paid leave benefits. For instance, they started working with the Employment Development Department who administer the benefit, to make sure that the application process is straightforward and accessible and that outreach and education efforts focus on reaching marginalized communities.

Currently, both groups are also co-designing a paid leave toolkit, which will include resources for advocates, organizers, promotoras, and others. Within the toolkit, there will be surveys, scenarios, activities and handouts that will be geared towards educating groups about the law and the application process. The scenarios included in the toolkit will help address and shift the narrative that exists around the barriers related to accessing paid leave. As part of the development of this toolkit, the Partnership and the California Work & Family Coalition are forming a community of practice that includes members from domestic violence organizations, rape crisis centers, and other organizations committed to improving access to paid leave in their communities. These groups will have the chance to review the toolkit, identify any gaps, and think through how to distribute it to other organizations and individuals. The data gathered from the surveys will also help educate policy makers on the barriers and challenges with the application process and implementation of the benefit.

In addition, this partnership has allowed a bridging of the gap between three state action plans – the Rape Prevention Education Plan that is being stewarded by the California Department of Public Health, California Department of Public Health's Essentials for Children, and the California Intimate Partner Violence Prevention State Action Plan, which is being led by the Partnership. By leveraging these various prevention efforts, the Partnership and the California Work & Family Coalition hope to create even greater awareness and access of paid family leave.

THE ROLE OF THE SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FIELD IN ADVOCATING FOR PAID FAMILY LEAVE

When Alejandra Aguilar, who leads the statewide prevention program at the Partnership, first started working on this issue, she was unsure about the connection between paid family leave and violence prevention. However, it didn't take her long to connect the dots between the law and the role it could play in working against common risk

factors for sexual and domestic violence, including financial dependency and lack of access to resources. One of the keys to her being able to connect the dots came from stepping outside the box. She says, "If we can focus on economic security and access to financial independence, then we are doing the work around prevention. It's an outside of the box way of thinking for us – but it makes perfect sense. It's one of the top reasons why people don't leave unhealthy relationships." For her, this way of thinking goes hand in hand with listening to the needs of the community, bringing diverse and varied skills to the table, and engaging in conversation with one another, leaning into each other's strengths.

Jenya Cassidy, Director of the California Work & Family Coalition, acknowledges the value of partnering with other organizations. She says, "It has been exciting to have this partnership and to be part of the intimate partner violence prevention world. It puts a whole new perspective in the constellation we're working in. Now we're looking at how key paid family leave is to health and wellbeing for everybody." By working to remove certain barriers, the California Work & Family Coalition and the Partnership are trying to make the case that paid family leave is a value-driven human right, and something that benefits society as a whole.



Alejandra Aguilar presents on some of the challenges faced by immigrants accessing paid family leave– Photo courtesy of Alejandra Aguilar

Alejandra Aguilar is Mexican-American, formerly undocumented, leading the Statewide Prevention Program at the Partnership, working to strengthen prevention efforts across California. She holds 15+ years of diverse experience working with survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual violence (SV). Throughout her work, Alejandra has used her voice to speak up about the relationship between abuse and oppression, the interconnectedness of all social justice efforts, and the need for service providers to acknowledge the diversity of lived experiences, recognizing that there is no "one size fits all" strategy for prevention or intervention. Alejandra values the importance of working together to promote collective liberation and stand in solidarity with our communities.

Jenya Cassidy is the director of the California Work & Family Coalition - a statewide alliance of parents, caregivers, and advocates organizing to realize equitable, family-friendly workplaces and to expand the social safety net in California. Before leading the Coalition, Ms. Cassidy was the California Policy Director for the Labor Project for Working Families, a union representative for SEIU, Local 250, and a community organizer in New York.

Written by:

Sonja Lockhart

PROGRAM ASSISTANT

[Prevention Institute](#)

Edited by:

Ashleigh Klein-Jimenez, MPA

PROJECT MANAGER

[CALCASA, PreventConnect](#)

Tori VandeLinde, MPH

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SPECIALIST, PREVENTION

[CALCASA, PreventConnect](#)

RESOURCES

- [Web conference recording and slides](#)
- [In Effort to Stop Domestic Violence, Advocates Teach Financial Independence California Health Report, July 8, 2019](#)

DISCLAIMER: This publication was supported by the Cooperative Agreement Number U1V/ CE002204, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.