



## Addressing Barriers to Workplace Leave

### What We Know

For three decades, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) has been the cornerstone of the U.S. Department of Labor's efforts to promote work-life balance. This landmark legislation has helped millions of working families balance the demands of the workplace, the needs of their families and their own health.

While the FMLA has been a transformational workplace protection, much work remains to ensure that workers can take leave when they need it. Department of Labor [survey data](#) shows that the unmet need for leave is significant: While 15 percent of employees reported taking leave for an FMLA qualifying reason over the course of the prior year, 7 percent reported needing to take leave for an FMLA qualifying reason, but not doing so. Unmet need for leave is more common among low-wage workers, women, Black, and Hispanic employees.

Among employees with an unmet need for leave,

- 18 percent report not taking leave because they were unaware of the availability of leave,
- 35 percent of employees did not take leave because they were worried about being treated differently at work because of their reason for needing leave, and
- 66 percent report not taking leave due to inability to afford unpaid leave.

## What We're Doing

Since the adoption of the FMLA in 1993, the Department of Labor (DOL)'s Wage and Hour Division has enforced its provisions and educated workers and employers about their rights and responsibilities under the law. As part of these continued efforts and in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the FMLA, over the next year, the WHD will:

**Engage stakeholders in discussions on the barriers to workplace leave.** WHD is committed to deepening its understanding of why some workers may not know they have FMLA leave protections available to them and challenging the stigmas workers may face for taking leave. WHD will work with other DOL agencies to engage stakeholders, including those representing marginalized communities, in listening sessions and roundtables on these issues.

**Launch an updated FMLA webpage with an improved user-centered experience to help workers understand and exercise their rights.** WHD recognizes that workers look to its online resources to find information on their FMLA rights. WHD's FMLA-related webpages average almost 9 million page views each year and remain the most visited across all WHD resources. WHD will engage stakeholders to further improve the design of its FMLA website to increase ease of use and accessibility.

**Issue new and updated FMLA guidance materials.** Over the last several years, WHD has developed guidance materials that have helped workers to understand their rights and employers to understand their responsibilities under the FMLA. New and updated fact sheets, posters, and presentations are being released to answer common questions, simplify the often-complicated nuances of the law, and offer more informative explanations that put the experience of the worker first.

**Launch a *Did You Know?* series to highlight FMLA protections.** While more than three-quarters of U.S. employees have heard of FMLA, many workers may not know how the law can protect them. As part of its continued education and outreach work on FMLA, WHD will launch a social media *Did You Know?* series on FMLA protections. This series will highlight aspects of the law to better help workers understand how they can use FMLA leave to take care of themselves and their families.