DENVER – Today, House and Senate lawmakers gathered with advocates, small business owners, health professionals and community members to highlight the urgent need to adopt a comprehensive paid family leave policy in Colorado for the sake of employees and employers alike. The rally coincides this week with the 25th Anniversary of Congressional passage of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.

“In today’s economy, parents have enough to struggle with and it’s time to ensure they have paid time off when emergencies come up, they have a new child, or a grandparent falls ill,” said Neha Mahajan, 9to5 Colorado executive director. “States can and should lead the way in creating paid family leave policies that work for families, for businesses, and for government.”

HB18-1001 creates a Family and Medical Leave Insurance division within the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, entirely funded and sustained through small, $2-5 weekly employee contributions to the Family and Medical Leave Insurance program. Those who have worked at least 680 hours in the previous year will receive 66 to 95 percent wage replacement when they take leave for their own serious illness or temporary disability, to take care of an ill family member, for the birth or adoption of a new child, and for approved military family needs for up to 12 weeks per year.

“The paid family leave bill is a win-win for companies and for their employees,” said Judy Amabile, President and co-owner of Polar Bottle and Good Business Colorado member. “Companies win because they get employees who come to work ready to be focused, productive and help build the business, and employees win because they can take the time they need to meet their family responsibilities.”

Colorado legislators have joined lawmakers from across the country in highlighting the need to do more for hardworking families while responding to the needs of businesses. Already this year, bills have been introduced in states across the country to create or enhance paid leave policies, including HB 18-1001, the Colorado Family Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Act.

“It’s past time for Colorado to expand paid family and medical leave that works for families, business, and our economy,” said Sen. Rhonda Fields (D-Aurora), one of the Senate sponsors. “America is the only developed nation in the world with no guaranteed paid leave of any kind. Supporting working families is not a luxury; it’s common sense. We need lawmakers to pass legislation that will lift up families so that women and men don’t have to choose between their paycheck and taking time off to care for their family.”
“FMLA was groundbreaking policy when it passed in 1993,” said State Rep. Faith Winter (D-Westminster), one of two House sponsors. “It’s helped millions of Americans and thousands of Coloradans since its inception. But it also has limitations: today it’s estimated that 64 percent of working people in Colorado can’t access unpaid leave under FMLA. And only a small percent of Colorado workers have access to paid leave. We can, and must, do better for families, and the businesses that employ them.”

Facts about FMLA and paid family leave:
• According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, FMLA has been used more than 200 million times since inception
• FMLA guarantees eligible employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave each year to care for a newborn, a new adopted child, or a seriously ill family member
• FMLA also allows employees to recover from their own serious health conditions, including pregnancy
• Unpaid leave under FMLA remains unavailable to 64 percent of working Coloradans
• In Colorado, there is a 15 percent gap in labor force participation between men and women, in large part because the United States lacks the same family-friendly policies of other countries

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