



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 27, 2017

Contact: Kate Constalie, kate.constalie@legis.wi.gov, 608-266-5490

Sen. Shilling column: Expand Family Medical Leave

Whether it's caring for a newborn or tending to a sick parent, at some point in our lives most adults will have to take time off from work to care for a loved one.

As a working mother with two young boys, my husband and I can relate to the daily challenges that families face when raising children and helping care for a relative. Like many others, we value flexibility and believe that reforming outdated workplace policies will strengthen our state and enable businesses to be more competitive.

Unfortunately, only 11% of U.S. employees have access to paid family leave through their jobs, which means millions of workers are forced to choose between family health obligations and the income they need to cover basic expenses.

Wisconsin was one of the first states in the country to adopt a Family and Medical Leave Act to protect the jobs of workers who must miss work to care for a sick loved one or newborn. Sadly, a recent Republican proposal would reduce access to family and medical leave protections and create more obstacles and barriers for working parents. This will take our state in the wrong direction and severely hinder further progress for the residents of Wisconsin.

Democrats are pushing for solutions to elevate Wisconsin families and address the changing work-life balance of modern families. With more dual-income households than ever before, our economy needs to move past the 1950's-era family structures and implement workplace policies that ensure flexibility and create a healthier workforce.

Democratic leaders Sen. Janis Ringhand (D-Evansville) and Rep. Sody Pope (D-Mt. Horeb) recently introduced legislation to create a Family Medical Leave Insurance Program that allows employees to contribute a portion of their paycheck into a trust fund. Employees would be eligible to receive a percentage of their pay during the time they take family or medical leave from work, at no cost to the employer. This innovative new proposal has earned the support of organizations that advocate for Wisconsin workers, including 9to5 Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Alliance for Womens Health.

Expanding family leave not only improves health outcomes and reduces health costs, but is an affordable way for businesses to support and retain workers when unexpected family and medical needs arise. All businesses, from Fortune 500 companies down to local mom and pop stores, benefit from a safe and healthy workplace. And so do working families.

If we want to boost our middle class, we need to focus on policies that will help families succeed. Ensuring working moms and dads have access to family medical leave is one way we can strengthen families and expand economic opportunities. Combined with additional Democratic solutions to expand health care coverage, student loan debt relief and affordable child care, we can modernize our workplace policies to be more efficient, cost-effective and family friendly.

Jennifer Shilling serves as the Senate Democratic Leader and represents the 32nd District which covers La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford and parts of Monroe County.

MEDIA NOTE: See email attachment for an official photo of Sen. Shilling.

###