[INSERT DATE HERE]

Your Name

Your Address

Your Representative

Your Representative’s Address

Dear Representative [INSERT LAST NAME]:

I am writing you to ask that you help families by working to increase the amount of maternity time allotted and the amount of this time that is paid to new parents in [INSERT STATE HERE]. I understand that the Family Medical Leave Act allows employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave, although typically only six weeks of short term disability is given or it may be the only time the family can afford to take off since it is paid and the FMLA does not grant pay. Most families rely on two incomes to survive and though the FMLA allows time off, it does not allow any compensation during this period and the FMLA is the only US policy in place for parental leave. Few states have any improved policy in place. Compare this to the more than 100 countries who allow *a minimum* of 12 weeks of paid parental leave. For example, Canada allows 50 weeks of parental leave at a salary of 55% up to maximum and an extra two weeks unpaid leave. In Europe most countries allow 14 weeks of paid leave. France allows 16 weeks fully paid with 2 years unpaid and your job guaranteed. Germany allows 14 weeks fully paid or 12 months at 67% and up to 3 years unpaid. Norway allows 56 weeks paid at 80% or 46 weeks at 100% paid. My point? In this realm, the United States is far behind other developing nations with similar economies. It’s about time we realized what other countries already know–the importance of maternity leave on not only a strong family but a strong nation.

What does a longer parental leave offer families? To begin, it would afford more mothers the time needed to develop a breastfeeding relationship with their child. The effects of suboptimal breastfeeding rates in the United States have been well-documented, with a 2009 review by Drs. Bartick and Reinhold in the journal Pediatrics suggesting that if the US could get 80% of mothers to follow the World Health Organization’s guidelines of exclusively breastfeeding for six months, the government would save $10.5 *billion* *per year* in health care costs while also saving 741 lives, the vast majority of whom are under the age of one. It has been well-documented that the early return to work that is common in the United States has a direct effect on the length of time that women breastfeed, with earlier returns to work resulting in earlier weaning times (e.g., Biagioli, 2003; Duckett, 1992).

A second benefit is that it can reduce the rates of post-partum depression and other psychological disorders plaguing many mothers. While PPD was long-considered solely an effect of hormones released post-birth, our understanding of the disorder has changed and we’ve realized that it is highly influenced by environmental factors. Support and sleep being two of the biggest (e.g., Dennis & Ross, 2005; Dørheim, Bondevik, Eberhard-Gran, & Bjorvatn, 2009). For mothers who have to return to work after six weeks, or even twelve, they suddenly find themselves working all day then returning to an infant they have to bond with and care for, meaning they get very little sleep and are often overworked with little instrumental support, increasing the likelihood of suffering PPD.

A third benefit pertains to the development of a secure attachment between infant and mother (or father). Infants with a secure attachment to their caregivers are not only more sociable and cry less (e.g., Bell & Ainsworth, 1972; van den Boom, 1994), but perhaps most importantly, are far less likely to be abused (Morton & Browne, 1998; Rogosh, Cicchetti, Shields, & Toth, 1995). In 2010 3.6 million children suffered abuse in the United States, with the highest rates being for infants. More than 80% of the time, the perpetrators were the child’s parents. Child abuse and neglect is a great concern for the nation and while there are already some funds allocated towards prevention of neglect and abuse I believe—and research supports—that increasing the amount of maternity leave can reduce abuse and neglect rates. In one study, there was a linear relationship between the length of maternity leave and the quality of the attachment between the mother and child (including positive affect and positive behaviours) (Clark, Shibley Hyde, Essex, & Klein, 1997). Breastfeeding, which I have already covered as being important to infant health, has also been found to increase bonding between mother and child (Else-Quest, Hyde, & Clark, 2003), and serves as an independent protective factor in abuse (Strathern, Mamun, Najman, & O’Callaghan, 2009). Specifically, controlling for other risk factors (e.g., income, education), formula fed infants are 2.6 times more likely to be abused than breastfeeding infants. I believe that allowing for a strong attachment relationship to form will create a successful child who will become an important contributor to society.

Because of these factors, I strongly believe employers of 50 employees or more should be required to give a minimum maternity leave of 12 weeks paid and up to 12 months unpaid with job guaranteed while employers with less than 50 employees should be required to give the current standard for the FMLA. Our babies are the biggest sufferers from current maternity leave standards and for a country that speaks of “family values”, we’re not putting our money where our mouth is. Our children are the future of the nation and we need to give them the best start at life, we need to give them what they deserve. Increasing the time allowed for maternity leave would help to improve breastfeeding rates, reduce post-partum depression and reduce child neglect and abuse by improving parent – child attachment.

I appreciate your help and ask you please send a response letting me know if you are able to pass a bill increasing maternity leave to help us to build not only stronger families but a stronger nation.

Sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME HERE]

[INSERT FULL RESOURCES LIST]