

FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE POLICIES IN NORTH CAROLINA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: BEFORE, DURING AND BEYOND COVID-19

MomsRising and Family Forward NC, in cooperation with the NC Association of County Commissioners and the NC League of Municipalities, conducted a survey of local governments in June 2021 to determine what family-friendly workplace policies local governments incorporated before the COVID-19 pandemic; what they added during the pandemic; and what they think they'll add or keep after the pandemic.

We shared the survey with local governments that have 20 or more employees. This includes all 100 counties and 206 municipalities. Of those, 130, or 42%, responded, representing 35 counties and 95 municipalities. **Twenty-five of North Carolina's 80 rural counties responded. Ten of North Carolina's 20 urban counties responded. Of the 95 municipalities that responded, 36 were urban and 59 were rural.**

TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SURVEY

Many organizations that answered the survey had family-friendly policies in place prior to the pandemic, and more have added or enhanced policies as a result. However, opportunities for growth remain.

1. Nearly all governments offered paid sick leave before COVID-19, and many organizations added or enhanced their sick leave policies as a result of the pandemic.

- Before COVID-19, 93% of local governments offered some paid sick leave.
- 77% offered paid kin care leave, or leave that gives employees the ability to care for dependents who are sick.
- More than one in four governments enhanced sick leave policies or created new sick leave policies because of the pandemic, ensuring that even more workers had paid leave to care for themselves or their families when sick.

2. Access to safe leave, or leave available to attend to a critical safety need related to issues like domestic violence or assault, lags behind other types of leave.

- Nearly one in four survey respondents offered paid safe leave prior to COVID.
- 3.8% added or enhanced this policy during COVID.
- Isolation during COVID has led to an **increase in domestic violence**, and safe leave can help to reduce domestic violence.



3. Access to paid parental leave also lags behind other types of leave.

- Prior to the pandemic, 40% of survey respondents offered parental leave.
- 7.6% added parental leave during the pandemic.

4. Local governments say they plan to continue a large share of their new or enhanced family-friendly policies, including flexible work, telecommuting, scheduling updates and new health insurance benefits beyond COVID-19.

5. Most organizations say their top reason for adding or enhancing benefits is to support employees.

- Other reasons include: strengthening the organization as they evolve and retaining employees.

3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR NC'S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THEIR WORKERS

1. PAID LEAVE

Ensuring employees have access to different types of paid leave is proven to improve attraction and retention of workers, keep women in the workforce, and **better support child health and well-being.**

Types of leave include parental leave, family and medical leave, sick leave, safe leave, and kin care leave.

A **2020 survey** of 350 NC employers showed that nearly one third (30.2%) have added additional paid sick leave or a new paid family leave policy. According to the **NC Council for Women and Youth**, few low-wage workers in the state receive employer-provided benefits such as paid sick and safe days, paid family and medical leave, and predictable schedules.

2. ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING WORKERS

About one in three mothers in the workforce—or 8 million workers nationwide—have already scaled back or left their jobs or plan to do so. Ensuring accommodations are in place for pregnant or breastfeeding workers is a low-cost way to keep mothers in the workforce and support child and family health and well-being.

- Currently, **30 states and five cities** have pregnancy accommodation laws.
- **60% of working moms do not have adequate break time or a private space to pump in the workplace.**
- In the **Surgeon's General Call to Action**, returning to work was cited as a significant barrier to breastfeeding.

3. CHILD CARE SUPPORT

Before the pandemic, 99 of 100 NC counties were child care deserts for infants and toddlers, with one space available for every three children.



During the pandemic, 62% of adults with children say **additional child care responsibilities** have hurt their ability to work and millions of parents, particularly women, have dropped out of the workforce or cut back hours because of child care needs.

But **NC parents report** that pre-pandemic, less than half of employers offered at least one child care benefit.

And a **family with two children in NC**—an infant and a four year old—spends an average of 33% of their income on child care.

All of this means that offering support finding, affording and maintaining high-quality child care is an essential way to support NC's working parents. Options to support include offering child care subsidies, backup or emergency care options, or on-site child care.