



New Jersey Time to Care Coalition  
Phone: 848.932.0081  
Email: [info@njtimetocare.org](mailto:info@njtimetocare.org)  
Website: [www.njtimetocare.org](http://www.njtimetocare.org)

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**Contact:** Dena Mottola Jaborska (609) 540-6609; [dena@njcitizenaction.org](mailto:dena@njcitizenaction.org)

**STATEMENT OF DENA MOTTOLA JABORSKA ON BEHALF OF THE TIME TO CARE COALITION**

***Christie's Conditional Veto of A4927, Paid Family Leave Expansion, Lets Families Down***

Governor Christie let New Jersey families down today by conditionally vetoing legislation that would expand and improve New Jersey's paid family leave program. With his conditional veto, which deleted all but the section of the bill which requires the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to educate the public and employers about the program, Christie turns his back on New Jersey residents who are caring for a seriously ill or dying parent or spouse, or a gravely ill child. His action also steals time away from parents of newborns who want to give their new child the best start possible but just can't afford to take time away from work. While this conditional veto is a setback for working families in our state, we believe it is only temporary. The future prospects for adoption of a law like A4927 are promising. Momentum for family friendly policies like these, are advancing around the nation. New York, Rhode Island and California have recently strengthened their paid family leave laws, and a similar law has recently been passed by Washington state and Washington DC. At least ten additional states are considering legislation.

Christie's conditional veto today's of A4927 is only one in a long line of actions and inactions he has taken that have meant caregivers faced with taking leave from work, have little or no safety net to prevent them from financial hardship, even devastation, when family members need them most. Shame on Chris Christie for failing to put families first today and throughout his time as Governor.

Almost the program's entire history, which began in 2009, coincides with Governor Christie's eight years as Governor. Christie has shown time and again to be no friend to the program. Over the past eight years, program weaknesses such as inefficient and slow processing of applications and benefits, low usage, inadequate benefits and families falling through the cracks of eligibility, became apparent. The Christie Administration took few steps to remedy the problems and many families in need went without paid leave support these eight years. In 2014, only 13% of families who gave birth or adopted, took advantage of the program. Additionally, it is estimated that less than 1 percent of family caregivers in the state made use of paid family leave.

All New Jersey employees pay into the program and should be aware and able to access the benefit when they need, but under Christie, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) spent almost no resources to educate the public and employers about the availability of the program, even though less than 40% of the public when polled, know the program exists. In response to the Governor's failure to dedicate available program funding to promote public awareness, the Legislature put funding in their budget multiple years for public education. This year the Governor line item vetoed \$3 million in funding that the Legislature wanted to allocate for educating the public about the program, and last year, he vetoed \$3.5 million.

The DOLWD has the money to fund this important outreach, in fact, according to DOLWD, the Family Leave Insurance fund balance in January 2017 was \$15.1M. Contributions for 2017 are estimated to be estimated to be \$106 million with only \$88.8 million being paid for benefits and \$2.9 million in administrative costs, which will leave an estimated fund balance of \$29.4 million for 2018. Clearly there is enough money to fund at least 3 million in outreach and education of the program.

There isn't a single person in our state who won't someday need time away from work to care for a new child or a sick family member. When that time comes, no one should face financial hardship or devastation. It should be the policy of that state of New Jersey to ensure that there is a lifeline for family caregivers to turn to in difficult times. The existing New Jersey Family Leave Insurance program has a number of loopholes and weaknesses that exclude far too many families in need. And the current program fails to provide enough financial support to families to ensure they can make ends meet while participating in the program.

A4927 would have greatly expanded and improved the New Jersey Family Leave Insurance Program, giving everyone in our state piece of mind that they would never have to choose between economic security and providing care to family members when they need us most. The legislation conditionally vetoed today would have:

- Increased the wage replacement to 90% of a participant's weekly wage, capped at approximately \$932 per week (adjusted annually).
- Expanded job protection to all who use the program and work at businesses with 20 or more employees. (Other laws such as FMLA and the NJ Family Leave Act cover job protection for paid leave participants working for at least a year at companies of 50 or more employees.)
- Expanded the definition of family to support caregiving of grandparents, grandchildren, parents-in-law, and siblings.
- Provided that benefits can be taken to care for or assist a family member who is a victim of domestic or sexual violence.
- Expanded the number of weeks available from 6 to 12 weeks and allowed intermittent use of the program to care for a newborn or newly adopted child. (Under current law participants must use the program for bonding in at least seven day increments.)