

Paid family leave now law in N.J.

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TRENTON - Gov. Corzine, ignoring harsh criticism and dire warnings from the state's business community, yesterday made New Jersey the third state in the nation to adopt a **paid-family-leave law**.

Corzine, who signed the bill to raucous applause in an early afternoon ceremony at the Statehouse, has supported **paid family leave** since his days as a U.S. senator.

New Jersey advocates had been fighting for the measure for more than a decade.

"I believe the daily reality of the lives of New Jersey **families** makes this historic **law** necessary," Corzine said. "I am confident this self-funded **family** insurance program will improve **family** life, fill a gap in our social contract with our citizens, and attract workers to this state. More than ever, I am proud to sign this bill into **law** on behalf of all working New Jerseyans."

Corzine also referred to his near-fatal accident last year, talking about how important it was for him that **family** members could take time off from their jobs to be with him. New Jersey's **paid family leave law**, he said, will allow other **families** to do the same in times of need.

It will allow workers to take up to six weeks of **paid leave** to care for sick **family** members, newborns, or newly adopted children. Federal **law** requires most employers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid **family leave**.

New Jersey workers would be eligible to receive two-thirds of their regular wage, up to \$524 per week. Workers will begin paying into a fund for the program in January through a payroll deduction, and may begin taking **leaves** in July 2009.

California is the only other state that offers a **paid-family-leave** benefit. Washington has adopted a similar measure, but it will not take effect until after New Jersey's.

The United States is unusual among industrialized nations in not offering **paid family leave**.

Critics of New Jersey's **law**, including the business community and most Republican legislators, argue that it will place an undue burden on businesses, particularly at a time when the economy is weak. "When jobs are fleeing New Jersey in record numbers and the economy is slowing, we simply cannot afford a new tax on every employee," said Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. (R., Union). "Legislative officials estimate the payroll tax will cost workers \$130 million per year. This is yet one more deduction from employee paychecks - one more tax out of dozens that New Jersey residents must pay."

The New Jersey Business and Industry Association, which opposed the measure, said its members sent more than 50,000 messages to the governor and the legislature urging them not to approve it.

"The **law** is likely to extract a steep economic price down the road in the form of lost jobs and a further deterioration of New Jersey's already poor business climate," said association president Philip Kirschner. "Rarely have we seen a more unpopular **law**. We believe **paid leave** will undermine the state's ability to retain and attract private-sector jobs."

The association noted that unlike the federal **leave law**, New Jersey's does not exempt businesses with fewer than 50 employees.

But advocates were ecstatic yesterday, praising Corzine and the legislative leaders, including Sens. Stephen Sweeney (D., Gloucester) and Barbara Buono (D., Middlesex) and Assemblyman Nelson Albano (D., Cape May), who pushed the bill through.

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Some argued that instead of being anti-business, the **law** would help New Jersey employers.

"This is a critically important victory for working **families in** the state, and one that will be good for businesses as well, helping them retain the skilled workers they have hired and trained," said Debra L. Ness, president of the National Partnership for Women and **Families**.

Charles Wowkanech, president of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO, also praised the passage of the bill.

"No longer will **families** have to make the very difficult and often painful decisions of caring for a newborn baby **in** their first weeks of life or caring for a critically ill **family** member, or going to work **in** order to pay the mortgage," Wowkanech said. "I believe that the values of America are better than that, and today New Jersey continues to lead the way to a more balanced, **family**-friendly society."

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Illustration/Photo: Gov. Corzine signs the **paid-family-leave** bill into **law** as two of its primary backers, Assemblyman Nelson Albano (left) and Sen. Stephen Sweeney (second from left), watch.

Photograph by: Feed Loader

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