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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
FEDERALLY EMPLOYED WOMEN (FEW)**

**HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE,
POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

HEARING on the Paid Parental Leave Act

March 6, 2008

**Federally Employed Women
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FEW is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1968 after Executive Order 11375 was issued that added sex discrimination to the list of prohibited discrimination in the federal government. FEW has grown into a proactive organization serving more than one million federally employed women (both civilian and military). FEW is the only organization dedicated solely to eliminating sex discrimination in the federal workplace and the only organization that monitors legislation particularly of concern to women employed in the federal government.

INTRODUCTION

Federally Employed Women (FEW) appreciates the opportunity to submit this written testimony about the Paid Parental Leave Act to the Federal Workforce Subcommittee. FEW's members firmly support the provisions included in HR 3799, the *Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2007*. Our members have been contacting their legislators urging them to co-sponsor and support this important bill.

On behalf of the more than one million women employed in the federal government (civilian and military), we thank Chairman Danny Davis and the other legislators serving on this Subcommittee for conducting this hearing. We pledge to work with all of you to enact this important bill into law.

BACKGROUND

As a private organization, FEW is the only national organization that works as an advocacy group to further the advancement of women employed by the federal government. Accordingly, FEW advocates promoting women's equality, eliminating sex discrimination in the federal service, and providing quality training opportunities to enhance skills and abilities. This includes contact with Congress to encourage progressive legislation. FEW national officers also meet with officials at all levels of agencies to demonstrate support of the Federal Women's Program (FWP), ask for their support and assistance with these efforts and to obtain insight into the effectiveness of programs to improve the personal and professional development of women in their agencies.

Every day, nationwide, FEW members work together to bring about an awareness of the issues facing women throughout the federal government and achieve positive reforms and equality for women in the federal workplace.

CURRENT PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES

Currently new parents employed by the federal government can take up to 12 weeks off upon the birth or adoption of a child – provided they can afford it or have enough annual or sick leave to use. These 12 weeks of leave are unpaid. As a result, many federal workers cannot enjoy the birth or adoption of a new child because they cannot afford to take time off work without pay.

HR 3799

HR 3799, the *Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2007*, would provide eight weeks of paid leave for federal workers following the birth or adoption of a child. This leave is for both mothers and fathers – a benefit that is better than many plans offered in the private sector.

FEW is in total concurrence with the bill's sponsor – Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-14-NY) – who accurately stated: “Antiquated family leave policies are a talent drain on the government – they’re an incentive for people to look elsewhere for work at the very time when our government needs them most.”¹

RATIONALE FOR BENEFITS

It's Right for Families:

Extra weeks of paid leave would relieve employees from having to use their sick or annual leave which they might need in the future if their child becomes sick or for regular doctor's visits essential during the first few years of a child's life.

Attracting New Federal Workers:

This bill would not only benefit current federal employees, but would also be a great new incentive for younger generations to work for the federal government. Considering the large number of retirements expected over the next couple of

¹ Ballenstedt, Brittany. “House Members Unveil Paid Parental Leave Legislation.” July 26, 2007 www.Gov.Exec.com.

years, we need to ensure that enough employees are employed with the federal government so that essential services they provide to all Americans will not be interrupted – from disbursing Social Security payments and benefits to protecting our nation, delivering the mail and helping the needy across the United States. Without an influx of new federal workforce recruits, these services, as well as hundreds more, will be in serious jeopardy.

Even the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Administrator Linda Springer admitted last May that the federal government's lack of paid leave was "hindering its ability to recruit women of childbearing age."² However, FEW does not agree with the OPM approach of offering paid parental leave as a short-term disability plan similar to the dental and vision insurance that requires employees to pay extra for its benefits.

Keeping Up with the Private Sector:

The private sector is competing for these young workers as well. As the Subcommittee members are already aware, federal workers on average do not earn as much in comparable salary as their counterparts in the private sector. Therefore to attract new federal workers, employment benefits must be at least comparable to the private sector. As Chairman Davis eloquently stated: "The federal government can't necessarily compete for talent with the private sector on a dollar-for-dollar basis, but we can make sure we are competitive in quality-of-life issues."³

Further, more than 50 percent of companies in the United States offer some type of parental leave, and many of these companies offer more than 12 weeks of paid leave to new parents. The federal government must at least match these benefits for potential employees.

² Ibid.

³ Rutzick, Karen. "Parenting Time: Pay and Benefits Watch." April 27, 2006 www.GovExec.com.

IN CONCLUSION

Again, we very much appreciate the Subcommittee and Chairman's interest in this issue and all the support you have given federal workers in the past. The members of FEW are concerned about the future federal workforce in our country and firmly believe that this added incentive could fill an ever-increasing gap in our federal workforce following the expected retirements of a large percentage of federal employees.

In addition, quite simply, new parents should be with their children and able to enjoy one of the most important moments in their lives without worrying about how to pay the bills. They deserve eight weeks of paid leave to ensure that their children receive all the needed attention and doctor's visits essential to the child's healthy start.

We look forward to working with the Subcommittee members and their staffs to enact this important bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rhonda M. Trent". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Rhonda Trent, President