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Good morning council members. I'm Tatsuko Go Hollo with the Economic Opportunity Institute. EOI is a non-profit public policy research and advocacy organization. Our mission is to ensure all Washington workers and their families have the opportunity to thrive and be financially secure throughout their lives.

Thank you for considering paid parental leave for county employees. Currently, three states and nearly every other country in the world provide paid family leave benefits to all workers. The availability of these programs has provided us with a wealth of research on the short-term and long-term benefits. The results are clear – paid family leave leads to positive outcomes for parents, kids and employers, without harming businesses or the economy.

Research is also clear on the need for at least 12 weeks of paid leave. Longer leaves are associated with lower infant mortality rates and lower high school dropout rates. Mothers who return to work before twelve weeks are less likely to take their child to recommended doctor's visits, to immunize their children and to breastfeed.

Study after study has shown that breastfeeding is good for babies and moms. The U.S. is currently 18<sup>th</sup> out of 24 OECD (organization for economic cooperation and development) countries in percentage of kids who exclusively breastfeed for 3 months. The American Pediatric Association recommends 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding. The need to return to work is one of the top reasons moms never start breastfeeding or only do for a short time.

Even when mothers have access to modern pumping equipment, refrigeration, and a private, sanitary place to conveniently pump milk routinely during their work shift, maintaining breast feeding after returning to work quickly becomes impossible for most women.

Breastfeeding has significant effects on the long-term health of children and mothers. Children who breastfeed are less likely to suffer from childhood illnesses, such as asthma, obesity and lower respiratory infections. Mothers who breastfeed are also less likely to experience obesity and have lower risk of certain

types of cancer. And women who take longer maternity leaves are less likely to develop post partum depression.

We know that one of the largest expenses for employers and the economy at large is health care. Research from paid family leave programs in the U.S. shows that paid family leave reduces medical costs. It also reduces reliance on public programs, including TANF and food stamps, which leads to public savings. Additionally, women with paid leave benefits are more likely to return to work and stay with the same employer, which reduces turnover costs for employers and provides a boost for our economy.

Paid parental leave is also important for new fathers and adoptive parents. Having both parents present during the babies first few weeks supports the mother's recovery from childbirth. That support is particularly important following complicated labors and caesarian deliveries, or when the baby is premature or has other health complications.

For all new parents, early bonding pays off long term in a stronger emotional health for the baby and a stronger relationship. Fathers who bond early are more likely to stay involved with the child long term emotionally and financially, regardless of whether the parents remain together.

Ultimately, it should never be a matter of luck whether a parent can afford to care for a new child. Every child deserves to be nurtured by their parents in their most vulnerable first months. A twelve-week paid parental leave program helps to ensure kids get the best start in life and parents are able to return to work healthier and more productive.

Thank you for considering 12 weeks of paid parental leave.