

On July 22, 2007, I gave birth to my first child and, as with millions of new parents before me, my life and my perspective were forever altered. One of the first challenges I had to face as a new mother was how to make it possible to spend as much time as I could with my newborn son. Fortunately for me, I met the requirements to take time off from my job as a prosecutor under the Family Medical Leave Act.

When I first found out I was pregnant and inquired about taking leave, I was surprised to learn that such leave is totally unpaid. All of my friends who hadn't had children were equally stunned as they, too, assumed at least some of this leave would be paid. Additionally, because I work for the government, I had thought that perhaps government agencies would offer enhanced benefits to serve as a role model for the private sector, but I was wrong.

I was permitted to use annual leave and after getting a note from my doctor stating that I needed time to recuperate from giving birth (which seems like it should be obvious) I was able to use my accrued sick time. So I managed to get a few of the twelve weeks off paid but while I was not being paid, of course, the mortgage still had to be paid, the utilities still had to be paid, and my huge student loans from law school still had to be paid, on top of all the new baby-related costs. Still, I was able to take the full twelve weeks largely due to a tragic event that occurred during my pregnancy—the death of my mother from cancer.

My mother died two days after Christmas 2006, about a month after I told her I was pregnant. She was very excited about her grandchild on the way. I thought she might hang in there long enough to meet her grandson but it was not to be. Much to my surprise, I learned after her death that she had a small life insurance policy for which I was one of the beneficiaries. I soon realized that this insurance money was the last and best gift I ever received from my mother because it was what made it possible for me to stay home with my baby.

Still, twelve weeks goes by fast when you are getting to know your own child. Twelve weeks of nursing him, holding him, rocking him to sleep. Twelve weeks of changing him, bathing him, and learning what soothes him. All too soon, twelve weeks had passed and it was time to leave my tiny baby and return to work. I cried three times during my first day back. To make matters worse, I soon discovered that finding child care for a twelve-week-old baby was exceedingly difficult and incredibly expensive. Thus, my husband—a nurse—left his job and took a weekend job so we can take turns caring for our child. My husband cares for our baby while I am at work during the week and I care for him alone on the weekends while he works twelve-hour shifts. This means we do not have to pay for child care but it also means we rarely see each other and seldom are together as a whole family.

Adding to the difficulties of returning to work is the fact that my baby depends on me for sustenance. The health benefits of breast milk are astounding, with research suggesting it not only means fewer colds and ear infections (and thus less parent absenteeism at work) but may help prevent everything from obesity and diabetes to leukemia. Trying to ensure

my son gets these benefits while at the same time having to return to work after twelve weeks has been an immense challenge. I have found myself struggling to be both a full-time prosecutor and a nursing mom, running to my office during recesses to pump breast milk and having my husband drive my son to my office each day to nurse at lunch. Still, I know that I am one of the lucky ones. After all, I not only had twelve weeks to nurse my son at home, I also have an office to nurse and pump in, unlike some other women I know.

In conclusion, despite these financial, emotional, and logistical challenges, I have benefited from the Family Medical Leave Act and I am grateful to the Honorable Pat Schroeder and other Congress members who created this incredibly important protection. To be honest, I was a bit reluctant to come speak to you today because I know that I am one of the lucky ones. I can't help but think about all the other workers who can not benefit from this law. Those who work two or three part time jobs and aren't lucky enough to be full time. Or those who simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave. Despite how crucial the FMLA is, it still does not go far enough to help enough people.

In the end, I want to say that if I'd had a choice, I would rather my Mom had had a chance to meet my son and to hold him in her arms rather than living off of her life insurance policy during my family leave. But sometimes life is about doing the best you can with the limited choices you are given and seeing a gift for what it is. So I am grateful for every day of those twelve weeks with my son and I thank those of you who created the FMLA. But I also thank my Mom for making it possible to actually use it. I know she'd be proud of me speaking here today. She was a single Mom who worked two jobs and put herself through school to become a psychologist. Her legacy was one of hard work and struggle and I now know how hard it must have been for her to leave us with babysitters and go to grueling jobs. And yet she fought to improve her life and to help me get where I am today. That was her legacy. I don't yet know what kind of legacy I will leave for my own child: our story is just beginning. Those of you involved in creating, protecting, or even seeking to weaken the FMLA will leave a legacy, too, and I challenge you to use the Family Medical Leave Act to instead create an even better legacy for the future. Thank you for your time and attention.