

Moms rise up, fight for workplace rights  
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Thousands of mothers and families, feeling squeezed by the growing demands of work while trying to care for children, are joining together in a new organization called [Moms Rising](#).

The group, launched in May 2006, advocates and coordinates grassroots campaigns for maternity/paternity leave, child care, job flexibility, and more after-school programs.

Moms Rising, whose membership has taken off to nearly 80,000 members, employs a variety of strategies to mobilize and organize mothers.

"The middle class is incredibly impacted by a lack of support for family-friendly policies," said co-founder and Executive Director Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner. "In the U.S., our policies and programs haven't caught up with modern reality."

Moms Rising is currently engaged in a legislative campaign in Pennsylvania to make it illegal for employers to ask about the marital or parental status of prospective employees.

The organization also approached 1,500 state lawmakers in all 50 states with examples of family-friendly legislation such as Illinois's AllKids Law, a comprehensive statewide affordable children's health insurance plan, according to Rowe-Finkbeiner.

Moms Rising then asked local members to follow up with the politicians to let them know the legislation has local support, Rowe-Finkbeiner said.

In addition, members can take up their own tactics. Yvonne and Ken Zick, a member couple in Washington state, have resolved to wear Moms Rising T-shirts 365 days of the year in 2007 as part of their campaign for a paid family-leave bill being considered in their state.

#### Pay issues

A central issue for Moms Rising is the "wage penalty" salaried mothers face when inflexible work environments force working mothers from their job, according to Rowe-Finkbeiner.

Nonmothers made 90 cents to a man's dollar in 1998, according to sociology professor Jane Waldfogel of Columbia University. Mothers made 73 cents to the man's dollar and single mothers only about 60 cents.

The difference often arises when salaried women are forced to put their careers on hold.

Degreed professional women who spend less than one year out of the workforce saw their salary set back 11 percent, while an absence of three or more years set it back 37 percent, according to the Center for Work-Life Policy in a 2004 report.

That wage penalty dampens their earnings power for years afterward.

"Rather than opting out of the workplace, many [salaried] mothers are pushed out because they're faced with no access to paid leave and extremely high childcare costs," said Rowe-Finkbeiner.

Once a mother is out of the workforce, getting back in can come at a price, too. A Cornell University study testing two professional profiles - ones of mothers and ones of nonmothers - demonstrated the mothers were 44 percent less likely to be hired. The same study showed that mothers were offered \$11,000 less in starting salary on average.

While many salaried and professional parents are pushed out of jobs by inflexible policies, those at the lower end of the wage scale have little choice but to stay on the job, according to economist Heather Boushey at the progressive Center for Economic and Policy Research. Instead, they do what Boushey refers to as "tag team parenting."

"Because of financial constraints, more people have to work to maintain a middle class lifestyle. Often it's not negotiable that someone not participate in the labor market," said Boushey, whose research shows no overall decline in the number of women working.

Issues affecting all mothers

Rowe-Finkbeiner co-founded Moms Rising with activist Joan Blades after they co-authored the book *The Motherhood Manifesto* in 2006.

Blades co-founded the progressive grassroots group MoveOn, which engages in online political activism. Moms Rising counts MoveOn among its partner groups, although the two are operated and funded separately.

Moms Rising also considers motherhood issues outside of the workplace. For example, it supports the creation of "a clear and independent universal television rating system" for TV with technology that allows parents "to choose what is showing in their own homes." Rowe-Finkbeiner points out, "[We] don't want censorship, we want parents to have the tools to choose what's appropriate for their home."

Moms Rising would also like to see cable channels unbundled for consumers, allowing more control of TV inside the home.

Member Colleen Butler says the issues Moms Rising faces cut across class and race lines in America today. "I think it is very difficult for all mothers in America today," she remarked. "Middle and upper middle class mothers are choosing between their once high-powered careers and staying home since so few companies offer flex time," she said.

For mothers lower down the scale, the situation can be more dire. Staying home to care for a child with a cold, for example, can mean choosing between the child's well-being and earning much-needed money.

Paid leave for sick children is available to 66 percent of families with incomes of \$71,600 per year or more, while for families making \$28,000 or less, it's available to 36 percent, according to **The Future of Children**, a journal published by Princeton University and the Brookings Institution.

Flextime is available to 62 percent of families making \$71,600 or more a year. It's only available to 31 percent of families making \$28,000 or less a year, according to the same source.

In terms of unpaid leave, the Department of Labor reveals that only 46.5 percent of private sector employees work for companies large enough to be covered under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Vicky Lovell at the nonpartisan Institute for Women's Policy Research agrees that there is a structural problem:

"Parents are expected to navigate competing time demands on their own, even though the issues they face are systemic."

"At all wage levels, unsupportive workplaces make it unnecessarily hard to be a responsible parent," said Lovell.

Moms Rising member Leslie Miller became involved after growing disenchanted with the contrast between the advice she read in the parenting books at the publishing house where she worked and the reality of the company workplace policies.

"The thing that is wonderful about Moms Rising is that it highlights all of the complex and sometimes subtle discrimination that mothers face, when in our post-feminist world everyone believes these issues have either been dealt with or lay at the feet of women who make the 'individual choice' to have children," she said.