



Pledge to Care



**PROJECT
MATRIARCHS**

2021



by gen z, for everyone
project matriarchs

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Wrap up and action items



Imagine a future in which public and corporate policy in the U.S. reflect the way each of us values caregiving. In this future, everyone can care for their loved ones without jeopardizing their financial security or sacrificing their career. In this future, work and care are compatible.

Project Matriarchs aims to bring Gen Z's energy and organizing power behind care, propelling forward the work of prior generations to transform care in the U.S. Written and organized by Gen Z students from all over the country, Pledge to Care is a tool to build generational consensus about the support we believe caregivers should receive from their employers. We mean all caregivers—from wage workers to salaried employees—no matter who they are caring for. Once we have consensus, we'll use our positionality as future employees to advocate for corporate change.

The urgency to enact policies in support of working caregivers in the U.S. has never been more apparent. Over two million women left the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic, erasing 30 years of progress towards gender parity in the workforce. Twice as likely to be forced out of the workforce, women of color continue to shoulder the largest burden of our country's care crisis.

Pledge to Care is an expression of values, a tool to challenge the way in which all of our systems undervalue care, starting with the private sector. We understand the magnitude of this ask. However, we believe investing in the well being of caregivers is both a responsibility and an opportunity. Companies have the chance to be at the forefront of a growing movement to ascribe value to care and create systems to match.

**PLEDGE TO CARE IS BY GEN Z, FOR EVERYONE.
JOIN US IN PLEDGING TO CARE**



We want employers to take responsibility for and invest in the wellbeing of their caregiving employees. While we believe it's the government's duty to enact public policy that establishes an adequate baseline of support for caregivers in the U.S., we also believe that the private sector has a critical role to play.

While Pledge to Care focuses on the private sector, we recognize that corporate policy is just one piece of the solution to our country's caregiving crisis. Public policy to secure progressive benefits for caregivers is particularly critical for wage workers whose employers likely provide minimal support.

Although inadequate, the [American Families Plan](#) would provide a baseline if passed. The private sector has an opportunity to model policy and culture change to support caregivers by improving upon the standard

set by public policy. While it's the role of the public sector to reflect the preferences of the majority, companies are uniquely capable of contributing to social movements. By implementing progressive care policies, companies can raise the public's standards for what support for caregivers should look like, in turn translating into public policy reflecting this new standard. The timeline around this transformation may be long term, but it has to start somewhere, and we think it should start with the private sector.

Crafting corporate policy gives employers the opportunity to specify benefits according to the particular needs of their employees. By nature of being tailored to particular contexts, corporate policies can achieve a level of specificity and effectiveness that any federal policy likely could not.

We want employers to track the caregiving status of their employees. 73% of employees have caregiving responsibilities, but 52% of companies don't even know their employees' caregiving status. As [TendLab](#) argues, "you can't fix a problem you can't see." This data should inform internal operations and should be shared with the public.



Because most employers don't track the caregiving status of their employees, very few recognize the way caregiving status impacts hiring, retention, compensation, and promotion. This makes it impossible to create policies that adequately support caregivers. Obtaining this data will enable employers to make informed decisions to benefit their caregiving employees. Furthermore, once this data exists, lack of clarity can no longer be an excuse to maintain the status quo. We want employers to collect this data, we want to be able to see this data, and we want this data to be used to enact effective change.

We want employers to acknowledge that care is an intersectional issue. We want employers to use data about caregiving status in conjunction with demographic data to illuminate the ways in which caregivers' gender and race inform their experiences as caregivers in the workplace.

Women of color are marginalized by overlapping and compounding systems of discrimination. Important distinctions are evident when looking at caregiving in intersection with race and gender. For example, although race is often left out of conversations about the gender wage gap, women of color face the largest wage gap of all.

Employers can use caregiving data in conjunction with demographic data to examine the impacts of caregiving on their employees—on salary, promotion, and daily experience—through an intersectional lens. These insights will shed light on the ways in which female caregivers of color are

particularly disadvantaged in the workplace, presenting the opportunity to address internal biases and patterns of discrimination. With more specificity around the problem, employers can create more specific solutions to better support everyone, particularly women of color.

We want employers to speak openly about their own caregiving responsibilities, setting the precedent for employees at all levels that they can do the same. This is an accessible, impactful way that anyone can contribute to the gradual erosion of stigma around the topic of care and the bias applied to caregivers in the workplace.



Policy change alone will not suffice to fundamentally change the way caregivers experience their workplaces. Although culture will shift alongside policy, leaders talking about their own caregiving experience can accelerate the pace of this change. Employees are likely to feel more comfortable in workplaces in which employees can embrace and express their dual responsibilities as working caregivers, and anyone in a workplace, especially those in leadership, can set an example.

We want employers to enact policies that reflect the most contemporary conceptions of gender. When crafting corporate policy, it is critical that employers continue to center the experiences of women. That being said, we want corporate policy to reflect the fact that our generation does not see gender as a binary.

We want gender-neutral policies because some parents do not identify within the gender binary. Terms like “maternity” and “paternity” can be alienating for nonbinary people. Gendering benefits in this way makes it unclear whether these programs are readily available for those who don’t identify along the gender binary. Our generation understands that the gender binary is a thing of the past, and we want corporate policies to reflect that.

We want employers to eliminate bias against caregivers from their hiring practices. Employers often fail to consider that caregivers may in fact be better at their jobs because of their caregiving experience, missing opportunities to hire or promote uniquely productive talent as a result.

It is illegal to base hiring decisions off of a candidate’s caregiving status, yet recruiters often reject caregiving candidates, assuming they will be less productive than their peers. Many recruiters view a resume gap due to childcare as a reason to refrain from hiring someone. Women, especially women of color, are more likely to have care-related gaps on their resumes than their male counterparts, making them more vulnerable to this form of discrimination.



Bias against caregivers can dissuade other caregivers from even reentering the workforce out of fear of discrimination. When companies eliminate discrimination against caregivers from their hiring practices, their productivity and profit will improve as a result of increased gender diversity.

Returnships can remediate some of the discrimination caregivers with resume gaps, who are disproportionately female-identifying, experience when reentering the workforce. By offering **returnships**, employers can signal to talent that it's okay to take extended time off from work for caregiving responsibilities. **Returnships** help companies access qualified and commonly overlooked talent.

We want employers to acknowledge how the motherhood penalty has impacted the careers of women, particularly women of color, and work to eliminate it in their workplaces. The very notion that a mother's caregiving status exists in inherent tension with her workplace performance is founded not in fact or research, but in misogyny. We want employers to stop punishing mothers based on the misguided assumption that a woman's motherhood defines her potential as an employee.

The motherhood penalty is significantly harsher for women of color. The motherhood penalty is not just a bias; it disrupts career progress, causing wage losses, contributing to the gender wage gap and affecting retirement benefits. While mothers suffer professionally from having children, fathers benefit through increased wages and greater access to

promotions. Fathers are often perceived as the 'most desirable' employees, as fatherhood, specifically, is associated with greater compassion and productivity. The fact that employers perceive fathers as uniquely qualified and mothers as uniquely hindered by their caregiving responsibilities is blatantly sexist.

We want employers to provide gender-neutral paid parental leave, allowing both partners in a relationship to take equal time off. Maternity vs. paternity leave programs reflect and reinforce



the sexist, heteronormative expectation that women in opposite-sex relationships take on far more caregiving responsibilities than men.

With only 17% of Americans having access to paid parental leave, many new parents are forced to choose between financial stability and caring for a new baby. No one should have to make this choice; paid parental leave should be a guarantee.

Paid parental leave helps companies retain talent and enables female-identifying parents in particular to maintain financial security and career progress. The median length of leave for American fathers is one week, ten weeks less than that for mothers. This sort of policy can restrict opposite-sex couples' capacity to split care responsibilities equitably, even if that's their intention.

Maternity vs. paternity leave programs are based on the heteronormative assumption that a male caregiver has a female counterpart who will take on the majority of the family's caregiving responsibilities. This dynamic is of course not the reality in some relationships, including same-sex male couples. As a result, same-sex male couples receive on average significantly less leave than opposite-sex couples.

We want employers to encourage male-identifying parents to take leave. When men in opposite-sex couples take leave, it sets the stage for a more equitable split of caregiving responsibilities in the long run. By encouraging men to take leave, employers will give our generation the agency to practice balanced, equitable caregiving dynamics, if we so choose.

Companies can counteract sexist, heteronormative caregiving archetypes by offering paid leave to all parents and establishing the expectation that new fathers take leave. When men take leave, everyone benefits; time off for caregiving responsibilities becomes destigmatized, women's wages

increase and employment rates increase across the board. Men taking leave also erodes the male-breadwinner-female-homemaker norm. Fathers who take parental leave are more involved at home and with caregiving responsibilities in the long run.



Additionally, nearly 70% of Americans support paid leave for fathers and the majority of fathers wish they had more time with their newborns. Our generation wants employers to expect and enable fathers to be equal caregivers. Managers should ask expecting fathers *when* they will take leave, not *whether* they will take leave.

We want employers to provide caregiving benefits that reflect a progressive definition of “family,” extending beyond biological kinship to include chosen family. We want employers to provide paid parental leave that’s accessible to all families, including those headed by adoptive parents, foster parents, and same-sex couples.

80% of households depart from the nuclear family model. Constructing systems of support beyond the nuclear, biological family has always served as a means of survival for LGBTQ+ and low-income people in the U.S. Restrictive definitions of family in corporate policy excludes nontraditional families, making it harder for them to access benefits guaranteed to their peers in traditional family structures.

Employers should provide benefits that actively enable and empower all parents, particularly for adoptive parents, foster parents, and same-sex couples to start families. Providing reimbursement for the cost of adoption and surrogacy is one way to do so.

We want employers to offer paid leave for all caregivers, regardless of who they’re caring for—from parents, to partners, to friends.

Employers should recognize caregiving responsibilities beyond parenting and across the lifespan as an expected and necessary part of each employee’s life and create paid leave programs accordingly. Caregiving needs beyond parenthood are ubiquitous; about one fifth of Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) is taken to care for an ill family member.

Some states, such as New York, provide twelve weeks of paid leave; companies would benefit from adopting a similar standard. Just like parental leave, accessible paid leave raises employee loyalty and morale and saves employers money.



We want employers to offer paid caregiving leave to minimum and low wage shift workers. Our generation believes paid leave should not be a luxury reserved for high-salaried executives.

Around 19% of the American workforce has access to paid family leave through their employers; only 6% of people working low-wage jobs, who are disproportionately women of color, are represented in this number. Many hourly earners cannot afford to take unpaid leave, meaning low-income people and women of color are not given the same opportunities to care for their loved ones as their higher-paid, mostly white counterparts. Our generation believes that income should not determine whether and how someone gets to be a caregiver. Companies that provide paid leave for their executives should provide paid leave for all of their employees.

Although the government should be responsible for guaranteeing paid leave for wage workers, our generation will recognize the companies that step up to meet the needs of the most vulnerable where the government currently does not.

We want employers to provide childcare support for all employees. When it comes to a caregiver's ability to participate in the workforce, childcare is often the determining factor.

Inadequate childcare costs caregivers and companies. Whether in the form of on-site childcare, partnerships with childcare organizations, back-up care or flexible spending accounts, implementing childcare benefits is an incredibly effective strategy to attract and retain talent because it allows parents to show up at work as productive employees.

We want employers to put their lobbying power behind caregiving policies, both public and corporate. By advocating for policy solutions, companies can challenge the narrative that care is exclusively a personal responsibility, instead reinforcing the notion that care is a societal issue that demands systemic solutions.



By simply vocalizing their recognition of caregivers' needs and struggles, companies can shed light on and ascribe value to what has for so long been invisible and undervalued labor. In so doing, companies will inform culture and alleviate caregivers' feelings of personal ineptitude in their struggle to balance work and caregiving in the U.S.

We will not tolerate values-washing. Our generation has witnessed enough of this to see through it. Expressing values can and should be more than a marketing ploy; actually putting those values to work will be a critical strategy to recruit and retain the next generation of talent.

To wrap up ...

Gen Z'ers: Join your Gen Z Peers in Pledging to Care.

Sign for everyone who has cared for you. Sign for the caregivers who have endured the status quo and have yet to receive the support they've long advocated for. Sign for women of color, who continue to bear the brunt of our country's caregiving crisis.

Sign as an investment in your own future. Sign so that insufficient care systems don't disrupt our generation's collective path to addressing the crises we've grown up around—from a burning planet to systemic racism and white supremacy.

Not Gen Z? Sign to signal to Gen Z the urgent need to activate around care.

Sign to express that our country's status quo around caregiving is unsustainable in its current state. Sign to tell Gen Z that employers will listen if they speak up about care, and that their energy and organizing power will make a difference. Think about all of the moments you've needed more support as a caregiver. Sign for yourself.

Take Action via our Action Tool Kit

Gen Z or not, Join Project Matriarchs in the fight for care. First and foremost,

1. **Sign Pledge to Care by filling out the form here and amplify it** across your networks using the graphics, caption copy, and tweets in this **Amplification Tool Kit**. Feel free to adjust the text however you like to reflect your own convictions around care.



Deepen your impact by putting Pledge to Care in places where employers will see it

2. **Signal your support for Pledge to Care to employers by adding Pledge to Care to your resume and LinkedIn profile**, if you have either or both.
3. **Commit to asking about caregiving policies in the hiring process, either in interviews or onboarding.** Asking about caregiving policies when interacting with recruiters will demonstrate to employers in no uncertain terms that our generation cares about the way employers treat their caregiving employees. By asking about caregiving policies in interviews, you may subject yourself to anti-caregiver bias. We acknowledge the bravery this takes, particularly on the part of those who may be additionally profiled according to their gender, race, and/or ability in the hiring process. For those of us who are able, this is an impactful but accessible action to repeatedly frame care as key to attracting our generation of talent. We ascribe a bit more value to care every time we ask about it.

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