ARKANSAS, ILLINOIS, MISSISSIPPI, & NEBRASKA

HEALTHY MOMS HEALTHY BABIES AMERICA

PAID LEAVE:
WHAT EMPLOYERS ACTUALLY EXPERIENCE

Covering parental leave is more manageable than most employers expect, and keeping a new parent is far cheaper than replacing one. A 2026 survey of 1,003 employers and 2,002 parents in Arkansas, Illinois, Mississippi, and Nebraska makes the case.



WHAT EMPLOYERS TOLD US

55% The typical leave adds no cost to the business.

55% of employers reported no additional cost to cover an employee's leave, and another **23%** said it cost no more than the employee's wage.

40% Replacement hiring is slow.

40% of employers said a new hire takes three months or more to match their predecessor's productivity; **21%** said more than six months.

2X MORE LIKELY Experience changes minds.

Employers who provided leave were twice as likely to say the benefits outweigh the costs (47% vs. 23%). Only **17%** of them reported significant financial strain.

WHY IT MATTERS: THE REAL COST IS TURNOVER

A leave is a short, planned gap; a resignation is a long, open-ended one. For **an employee earning $65,000**, a typical three-month replacement (one month to hire, two months at half productivity while training) **costs about $10,000 in lost output**, before recruiting fees. That risk is real.

40% of mothers **25%** of fathers

changed occupations after their most recent birth, and mothers who stayed employed often moved into lower-wage work.

Across the four states, a 10% gain in new-mother retention is worth roughly $64 million a year to employers.

> Employers already see the link. Asked why they offer leave, owners said it plainly: **"Retaining good employees"** (Illinois) and **"Productivity and continuity"** (Arkansas).

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. **Price parental leave against turnover, not against zero.** Even **4 to 6 weeks** of paid leave could help lower the odds of losing an employee and paying the full replacement cost.
2. **Plan coverage with the team you have. Most employers covered leave internally;** a simple cross-training and handoff plan makes that easier.
3. **Small businesses have options.** Short-term disability coverage, PTO bridging and shared-cost insurance pools can **provide meaningful leave without carrying the full cost alone.**
4. **You do not need a mandate to lead.** Nebraska employers offer company-paid leave at **nearly twice the rate** of Arkansas and Mississippi (**28.6% vs. about 16%**) with no state requirement.

Source: Main Street Analytics surveys, February–June 2026. Business Survey: 1,003 HR professionals and owners; Parent Survey: 2,002 parents; Arkansas, Illinois, Mississippi and Nebraska.