

**JEWES UNITED
FOR JUSTICE**
THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.



Labor on the Bimah

Labor on the Bimah 2021: Maryland Campaign for Paid Family and Medical Leave

To learn more about JUFJ and our campaigns, visit jufj.org or contact:

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Welcome to Labor on the Bimah	3
Sermon Starters	4
Caring for ourselves	4
Caring for our families and households	4
Caring for working people	6
Caring for our whole community	7
Nitzavim: it is not in the heavens	8
Shmita: let rest and lie fallow	10
The Campaign for Paid Family and Medical Leave	12
Our Stories	12
The Current Campaign	14
Resources	16
About Jews United for Justice	17
Take Action with JUFJ	18

Welcome to Labor on the Bimah

Welcome to Labor on the Bimah! Since 1998, Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) has worked to put “labor” back into Labor Day by engaging our local Jewish communities in a collective conversation about our texts, our historical experiences, and the challenges facing workers today. **JUFJ is providing congregations with this resource packet, working with congregations to arrange speakers, and planning follow-up events to help members of participating congregations learn more about some of the injustices facing Maryland workers today.**

The theme of Labor on the Bimah this year is **Paid Family and Medical Leave**. JUFJers across Maryland — including members of your congregation — began working to pass a Paid Family and Medical Leave law in 2019. In the face of so many injustices in our world today, we chose this campaign because **providing workers with paid leave when they are welcoming a new child, caring for an injured or sick family member, or caring for themselves is critical. Paid leave prevents working families from having to choose between putting food on the table and taking care of a loved one.** As we explore in the following pages, there is ample evidence that **our Jewish tradition holds sacred both the value of work and the need to take time away from that work to care for ourselves and our families.**

JUFJ is proud of the role we played in the passage of Paid Family and Medical Leave in Washington, DC, where 10,000 working people have been able to take paid leave over the last year, something that’s been especially necessary for families during the pandemic. In Maryland, we are working with the [Time to Care Coalition](#) to pass a bill in the General Assembly that will ensure paid leave for working people and their families all across Maryland.

In this packet you’ll find resources to help you plan a sermon or other Labor on the Bimah programs. You’ll find readings and sermon starters, information about the Paid Family and Medical Leave campaign in Maryland, and **printable “About JUFJ” and “Take Action” flyers to share with your congregants** detailing current advocacy efforts and how to get involved. This packet is meant to help spark your thinking about how attaining Paid Family and Medical Leave in Maryland is connected to Jewish themes and values. We hope these materials will serve as jumping off points, and of course we invite you to supplement them with your own stories, texts, and insights. We look forward to talking more about how we can work together to create a meaningful Labor Day Shabbat experience for your congregation as well as future programs we can do together.

Shanah tovah umetukah! // שנה טובה ומתוקה!

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Sermon Starters

Caring for ourselves

Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon aka Maimonides, 1137 - 1204 CE, Spain → Morocco → Egypt)

Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 4:1

<p>Because keeping the body in a healthy and sound condition is a God-chosen way (for it is impossible to understand or know anything of the Divine knowledge of the Creator when one is sick), it is necessary for a person to avoid things that are destructive to the body and to behave in ways that are healthy and life-giving.</p>	<p>הואיל והיות הגוף בריא ושלם מדרכי השם הוא. שהרי אי אפשר שיבין או ידע דבר מידיעת הבורא והוא חולה. לפיכך צריך להרחיק אדם עצמו מדברים המאבדין את הגוף. ולהנהיג עצמו בדברים המברין והמחלימים.</p>
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Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (aka the Ramchal, 1707 - 1746 CE, Italy → Israel)

Derech Hashem 1:4:7

<p>For this too is a commandment upon us: to preserve our body through proper preparation so that we can serve our Creator with it and use [things] from this world with that intention and for that purpose, according to that which is required for us. And it comes out that we are elevated through this act, and the world itself is elevated with it – by its being helpful to a person in service to their Maker.</p>	<p>כי גם זה מצוה עלינו לשמור את גופנו בהכנה הגונה לשנוכל לעבוד בו את בוראינו ונשתמש מהעולם לכוונה זו ולתכלית זה כפי המצטרך לנו ונמצינו אנחנו מתעלים במעשה הזה והעולם עצמו מתעלה בזה בהיותו עוזר לאדם לשיעבוד את בוראו:</p>
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Judaism teaches us, in numerous ways, that caring for ourselves and others is a religious obligation. When we recite the prayer for healing, or wish someone a *refuah shleimah* – complete healing – we are reminded of the duality of caring for both the body and the soul. When we fulfill the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim*, visiting sick people, we lessen the burden and suffering of those who are ill. Maimonides elaborated on this notion by listing healthcare first on his list of the 10 most important communal services that a city must offer. Paid Family and Medical Leave is an essential component of today's healthcare because it enables us to care and heal completely. When an illness – or the illness of a loved one – prevents a person from earning the paycheck they need, that added stress and anxiety only complicates the recovery process. Whether you believe, as taught in these texts, that sickness separates us from divinity, or you simply notice how difficult it is to be part of a rich communal life when suffering and struggling economically, we all need time for caregiving, nurturing, and recovery so that we can be our full selves in community and connection with the Source of Life.

Caring for our families and households

Deuteronomy 5:16

Honor your father and your mother, as your God has commanded you, that you may long endure, and that you may fare well, in the land that your God is assigning to you.	כבד את אביך ואת אמך כאשר צוך ה' אלקיך למען יאריכך ימיך ולמען ייטב לך על האדמה אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך
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Rabbeinu Yonah (Rabbi Yonah Girondi, Spain, c. 1263 CE)

Sefer HaYirah, section 266

Be careful not to afflict any living creature, whether animal or bird, and all the more so, one should not afflict a person, created in the image of the Divine. If you want to hire laborers and you find that they are poor, they should be [regarded as] poor members of your household. And do not degrade them, rather give them their orders in a respectful manner, and surely pay their wages.	השמר מלצער בע"ח הן בהמה הן עוף, וכ"ש שלא לצער אדם שהוא עשוי בצלם המקום. אם אתה רוצה לשכור פועלים ומצאת עניים יהיו עניים בני ביתך, ואך אל תבזה אותם, אך דרך כבוד תצוה להם, ותשלם שכרם משלם...
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The 5th of the 10 commandments helps lay the groundwork in Judaism for the principle that family comes first. Today's Jewish life is organized as much around the family and the home as around the synagogue or any other institutions. No matter what your family looks like – whether it is a family that you grew up in, a family you have created with your partner(s) and child(ren), or a chosen family of friends – family is where we celebrate holidays, nurture, mourn, learn, and more. As the definitions of family and family roles change over time, it is important that our society and laws reflect the sacred nature and obligation of family caregiving – not only parents caring for children and children caring for parents, but beyond.

We should also think expansively about the obligations we have to our immediate family, our extended family, our collective Jewish family, and our chosen family, as the second text illustrates. We are reminded of the principle of *kol yisrael areivim zeh bazeh*, that all Jews must ensure other Jews are taken care of and have their needs met. For many of us, that same responsibility extends to all humanity. While you yourself may already have access to paid leave, that does not mean your sibling, your neighbor, your fellow Jew, or the stranger down the street does. In fact, it is often only the highest paid jobs that include paid leave benefits, which means the people who are most financially insecure are the same people who don't get paid when they need it the most. We must work to ensure everyone has access to the time and resources they need to care for themselves and their families.

Caring for working people

Deuteronomy 24:14-15

<p>Do not oppress a hired laborer who is poor and needy, whether your kin or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. Give them their wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for they are needy and their life depends on it (literally: “they set their soul upon it”), lest they cry out to God about you and you will incur guilt.</p>	<p>לא תעשק שכיר עני ואביון מאחריך או מגרך אשר בארצך בשעריך ביומו תתן שכרו ולא תבוא עליו השמש כי עני הוא ואליו הוא נשא את נפשו ולא יקרא עליך אל ה' והיה בך חטא</p>
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Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Bava Metzia 112a

<p>Alternatively, the phrase “for they set their soul upon it” (from the verse in Deuteronomy above) teaches us that, concerning anyone who withholds the wages of a hired laborer, it is as though they (the one who withholds wages) take their soul from them (the hired worker).</p>	<p>דבר אחר ואליו הוא נושא את נפשו כל הכובש שכר שכיר כאילו נוטל נפשו ממנו</p>
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No one wants or plans to face a serious illness. And yet, at some point everyone will battle a major medical condition, need to care for an ill relative, or welcome a new child. These moments are part of life no matter your income level. Our Torah understands this reality, and our sacred texts implore us when we are in the employer role to do right by our employees. As we see here in these texts — and as most of us know from our own lives — the wages that people earn are absolutely crucial. When working people lose the income they need to sustain and care for themselves or their families, that loss is a threat to their very existence. To risk someone’s economic security through the anguish of asking them to deal with an unplanned illness or the joy of a new baby without paid leave is an affront to the fair and just employment system our Torah seeks to create. When we treat working people with the dignity they deserve, their families, our communities, and our whole city are more likely to thrive.

Caring for our whole community

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Demai 19a

<p>In a city where non-Jews and Jews live, the <i>tzedakah</i> collectors collect from Jews and non-Jews and support the Jewish and non-Jewish poor, visit the Jewish and non-Jewish sick and bury the Jewish and non-Jewish dead, comfort the Jewish and non-Jewish mourners, and return lost goods of non-Jews and Jews, for the sake of peace.</p>	<p>תני עיר שיש בה גוים וישראל הגביים גובין משל ישראל ומשל גוים ומפרנסין עניי ישראל ועניי גוים ומבקרין חולי ישראל וחולי גוים וקוברין מתי ישראל ומתי גוים ומנחמין אבילי ישראל ואבילי גוים ומכניסין כלי גוים וכלי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום.</p>
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Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg (1915 - 2006 CE, Jerusalem)

Tzitz Eliezer 5:4 (Collection of Responsa on Medical Issues volume 4)

<p>It has been enacted that in every place in which Jews live, the community sets aside a fund for care of the sick. When poor people are ill and cannot afford medical expenses, the community sends a doctor to visit them, and the medicine is paid for by the communal fund.</p>	<p>מתקון הצבור בכל מקום ומקום שישראל יושבים, ליחד קופה לביקור חולים, והוא שהחולים העניים שאין ידם משגת להוצאות רפואתם, הקהל שולחים להם רופא לבקורם והרפואות מכיס הקהל</p>
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When caring for yourself or a loved one, what resources or social structures have you needed? What kind of support – physical, emotional, or spiritual – have you given or needed when welcoming a new member of the family?

Jewish tradition elaborates broadly on our responsibilities to our communities as well as very narrowly on our responsibilities for individual acts of caring like visiting the sick. The texts above — one ancient and one contemporary — are just two that instruct Jews on creating caring communities that meet the needs of both Jews and non-Jews. Our sacred texts teach us that everyone, regardless of their individual means, is worthy of having full access to the resources they need to heal and to care. Further, the texts strongly suggest that we all share an interest in the welfare of **all** city residents: we will all be better off when the city has “peace.” Strong protections for working families should be part of this collective self-interest in a peaceful city — we all do better when Maryland’s laws and policies benefit all residents and workers, not just some of them. A Paid Family and Medical Leave program will add to our state’s social safety net and reflect our obligations to our neighbors and to creating a more just world.

Nitzavim: it is not in the heavens

Parashat Nitzavim is read on Shabbat of Labor Day weekend, September 3-4

Deuteronomy 29:9-11

<p>You stand this day, all of you, before your God – your tribal heads, your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your women, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water-drawer – to enter into the covenant of your God which your God is concluding with you this day.</p>	<p>אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ה' אלקיכם ראשיכם שבטיכם זקניכם ושטריכם כל איש ישראל טפכם נשיכם וגרך אשר בקרב מחניך מחטב עציך עד שאב מימיך לעברך בברית ה' אלקיך ובאלתו אשר ה' אלקיך כרת עמך היום</p>
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The opening of Parashat Nitzavim describes the community that has been summoned by Moses to stand before God and hear the terms of God's covenant. Note that the Torah takes the time and space to list each type of person present. By identifying each type of person, the Torah is personalizing the nation. This is not just a nation of nameless, faceless people. Instead, it is a nation of individuals, people with occupations and roles in their communities — one where each person has a purpose and is counted among the community. This is the approach we must take when we think about workers' rights and social justice.

Working toward recognizing an individual's humanity and importance — to their family as well their community — is central to living in a just society. This is the first step toward making change in our midst: recognizing people as people, individuals with their own lives, families, friends, hardships, needs, and joys.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

<p>For this commandment which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to us, so that we can fulfill it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and fetch it for us, to tell [it] to us, so that we can fulfill it?" Rather, [this] thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it.</p>	<p>כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא נפלאה הוא ממך ולא רחקה הוא לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפוך ובלבבך לעשתו</p>
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Torah, in its many interpretations, is meant to guide Jewish life: our values, our actions, our goals, and our most important decisions. Sometimes, though, it can feel challenging to reconcile the ideals we learn from our study of Torah with the limitations and difficult conditions imposed on us by “real life.” For example, our tradition teaches that workers should not be oppressed, going as far to say that a poor worker should be treated like a member of our own household. Such teachings may sometimes strike us as nice sentiments but unlikely or impractical to implement in an economic system based on the idea of limited resources.

This kind of conflict may sometimes make Torah feel idealistic, esoteric, impractical, or outdated. Yet the Torah itself anticipates and responds to this argument, declaring that it is neither too hard for us, nor too distant. It must have meaning in our everyday lives and we are capable of living it.

That message can be applied to our actions to create a just workplace. If we have the courage to recognize that some labor practices create working conditions that run contrary to Jewish values and sometimes Jewish law, we can act knowing that a just workplace creates a net positive good. Parashat Nitzavim urges us not to imagine this goal as too far away or unattainable, but to take it upon ourselves to act, using our mouths and our hearts, to enact policies like a Paid Family and Medical Leave program for Maryland that will help us care for ourselves, benefit our whole community, and honor the Divine spark in every human being.

Shmita: let rest and lie fallow

Exodus 23:10-12

<p>For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but in the seventh, you are to let it rest [<i>tishm'tenah</i> in Hebrew, which is where we get the name "Shmita"] and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave, let the wild beasts of the field eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, with your olive grove. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed.</p>	<p>ושש שנים תזרע את ארצך ואספת את תבואתה והשביעת תשמטנה ונטשתה ואכלו אביני עמך ויתרם תאכל חית השדה כן תעשה לכרמך לזיתך ששת ימים תעשה מעשיך וביום השביעי תשבת למען ינוח שורך וחמרך וינפש בן אמתך והגר</p>
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Leviticus, 25:1-7

<p>And God spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a Shabbat of God. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and you may gather in its crop. But in the seventh year, the land shall have a Shabbat of complete rest, a Shabbat for God: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.</p>	<p>וידבר ה' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם ושבתה הארץ שבת לה' שש שנים תזרע שדך ושש שנים תזמר כרמך ואספת את תבואתה ובשנה השביעת שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ שבת לה' שדך לא תזרע וכרמך לא תזמר את ספיח קצירך לא תקצור ואת ענבי נזירך לא תבצר שנת שבתון יהיה לארץ והיתה שבת הארץ</p>
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Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon aka Maimonides, 1137 - 1204 CE, Spain → Morocco → Egypt)

Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3, 39:4

<p>As to the principles enumerated in the laws about the year of release (i.e., the Shmita year) and the jubilee year (the year following 7 cycles of Shmita): some of them are about compassion for humankind and promoting the wellbeing of all humankind, as it is said "Let the needy among your people eat of it," (quoting Exodus 23:11 from above). And besides, the land will also increase its produce and improve when it remains fallow for some time.</p>	<p>ואמנם כל ה'מצוות' אשר ספרנום ב"הלכות שמיטה ויובל" מהם - לחמלה על בני אדם והרחבה לבני אדם כולם - כמו שאמר "ואכלו אביוני עמך ויתרם תאכל חית השדה וגו'" ושתוסיף הארץ תבואתה ותתחזק בעמדה שמוט.</p>
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Exodus and Leviticus describe what has become known as “a *shmita* year,” or just *shmita*. As the Torah explains it, during a *shmita* year all agricultural activity must cease and all people, no matter their social position, rest from the agricultural work that was essential to their survival. People’s needs will be met in other ways. But *shmita* is not just about agriculture. It is described as God’s Shabbat – a sacred time for rest, recovery, and rejuvenation. Maimonides, in the text above, describes the purpose of many of the laws associated with *shmita* as promoting the wellbeing of all humanity. Today, this kind of restful investment in wellbeing comes in many forms, like vacation as a break from everyday obligations, or paid sick days for recovering from the flu. But neither is sufficient. Working people need extended paid time off to heal and care for ourselves or our loved ones, to welcome a child, navigate a serious illness, adjust to a military family member’s deployment, and more.

Maimonides also teaches that land that lies fallow will improve and increase its produce when it comes back into use. What is true for fields is much more so for human beings! Research shows that people are more productive and engaged when they can take adequate time away from work to rest and attend to their personal needs. The same also seems to be true for organizations. In states with Paid Family and Medical Leave policies, data show a stronger and healthier workforce, which benefits both employees and employers.¹

Many small businesses already offer their employees vacation time and a few paid sick days, but can’t afford to offer weeks of paid leave without the support of a public program. This was the case for Jews United for Justice, which can now offer our staff more comprehensive Paid Family and Medical Leave thanks to the DC program. Many small businesses in DC clamored for this program in order to compete with larger businesses who could already offer employees paid leave benefits.

This has been the experience of Aaron Seyedian, the owner of Well-Paid Maids in Maryland, who is advocating for a policy that will cover not just his employees, but the whole state:

As a small business owner who employs and serves Marylanders, I am eager to see paid family and medical leave enacted in our state. After having provided paid family and medical leave to my employees for over three years, I can tell you that in addition to being moral, logical, and practical, paid leave is affordable and beneficial to businesses... Now, we have a generous paid time off policy – 20 days per year – but PTO does not and cannot cut it. There are so many illnesses and injuries and life events that we know just take longer. So by being able to use paid family and medical leave, my employees can actually take the time they need when it’s a situation that would otherwise be financially impossible for me cover via PTO or one that they’d try to work through, risking their health and safety, ruining their job performance, and increasing the likelihood that they’d quit.

When we view *shmita* through a holistic lens — a time of healing rest for the land and for the people — it is clearly connected to ensuring that all workers can take the time they need to care for themselves and their loved ones.

¹ [Maryland Center for Economic Policy, Maryland Businesses Would See Benefits from Paid Leave](#)

The Campaign for Paid Family and Medical Leave

Our Stories

We encourage you to lift up your own stories of family or medical leave or to give opportunities for members of your congregation to share their stories with each other. Stories are always the most powerful in first person! We are including reflections from a few of our campaign leaders, all delivered in testimony before the Maryland House Economic Matters Committee, to help inspire your sermon.

“My husband is a Chief Petty Officer on active duty in the United States Navy. He is currently stationed for a fifteen-month tour in Manama, Bahrain. When he received orders to Bahrain, we had about 90 days to make arrangements and say goodbyes. At the time, I was lucky enough to work at a job that provided leave, so I was able to take time off from work to deal with the many logistical tasks one faces when one’s partner will be gone for over a year. Cancel the cellphone, sell one of the cars, arrange transportation for the days he was on drop-off or pick-up duty for our second-grade daughter. And more important than those arrangements, I was able to take time to spend time with him before our forced separation.”

...

“And please don’t forget the emotional toll. Imagine your partner was suddenly going to be away for six to twelve months, with a risk of not coming home at all. Imagine having young children who are scared and don’t understand what is happening. Families should have time to be together in the days and weeks leading up to deployment, without risking financial ruin. When that service member gets their “rest and recuperation” (R&R) leave with an opportunity to visit home, their working loved ones should be able to take time off to be with them, regardless of their employer’s paid vacation policy. Imagine a service member comes home from their deployment with a significant injury or mental health condition that needs to be addressed. Their working loved one needs this Time to Care.”

~ Tracie Guy-Decker, Baltimore

“I was working as an independent contractor when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The chemotherapy I received every two weeks made me sick for the first 11 or 12 days, so that it was nearly impossible for me to work for several months. A paid family and medical leave law would have reduced a great deal of the stress associated with being sick by lessening the financial burden. At the same time I was dealing with my breast cancer, a single mother who lived nearby was suffering with the same diagnosis. She continued to work through her treatment because she didn’t have the support she needed to take time off from work. Consequently, she never had the chance to rest and recover. A few months later, as I was getting back on my feet and returning to work, I learned that she had died. I wonder if things might have been different for her if she had had access to paid family and medical leave.”

~ Jo Shifrin, Bethesda

“In 2019, my son spent a total of 64 days hospitalized, all from late August onward. Four weeks — 28 of those 64 days — were spent in emergency rooms waiting for an inpatient placement... During that waiting period...we lived with our son in the emergency room... We were able to do this only because my wife and I both work for synagogues with supportive congregants, boards, and coworkers. We both work part-time for small religious organizations — a necessary compromise to help ensure that we can support our son’s school in the event of an incident, and thus we lack even unpaid family leave under the federal FMLA. Without the understanding of our respective communities, we would have had to decide who was going to lose their job to stay with our son. We would certainly have lost our home in that situation, a particularly destabilizing experience for a child with autism.”

“No Marylander should face the choice of remaining employed or caring for an ill or disabled family member — and they certainly should not have to choose between employment or family for acute, short-duration illnesses. And no Marylander who is paid on an hourly basis should be forced to choose between earning a wage or caring for a family member and going unpaid because they could not go to a job that pays only when hours are logged.”

~ Rabbi Jeremy Kridel, Ellicott City

“My daughter, Dora, was born in December 2020. In the years that I’ve dreamed of motherhood, I’ve imagined having several months at home with my newborn. As a physician, I know that this time is vital: to recover from the many changes the body undergoes in pregnancy and labor, to establish breastfeeding, and to bond with a baby. In recent years, physicians and midwives have begun referring to the 12 weeks after birth as the “fourth trimester,” recognizing the importance of this time period for both parents and children. So, when I became pregnant with Dora, I hoped to be home with her for at least 12 weeks before returning to work.”

“Unfortunately, neither my husband nor I qualified for our employers’ paid parental leave programs... I am grateful that my workplace recognizes the critical nature of the fourth trimester and is allowing me to take six weeks of unpaid leave beyond the six weeks of short-term disability I was granted. We are privileged as a family to be able to afford this financially. As I write this, Dora is seven weeks old... I cannot imagine returning to work right now without compromising my health, Dora’s health, or the quality of medical care I provide. I worry about the physical, mental, and financial health of the many parents in our state (and their children) who do not have the economic resources I have and must return to work at or before six weeks postpartum.”

~ Jessica Friedman, Baltimore

The Current Campaign

Nearly everyone needs to take time away from work at some point to care for a relative, deal with a serious personal illness, or welcome a baby. However, state and federal policies only provide for unpaid leave in these situations. With the skyrocketing costs of childcare, medical fees, and everyday life expenses, most families can't afford to go weeks without income. This forces too many working families to make the impossible choice between earning an income or taking the time they need away from work. By creating a Paid Family and Medical Leave program for Maryland, we can enable everyone who lives or works in the state to continue earning a portion of their pay while they take time away from work to address a number of critical needs, including:

- Caring for a newborn, a newly adopted child, or a newly-placed foster child
- Addressing a serious personal health condition, including pregnancy, accidents, and long-term and chronic illnesses
- Caring for a family member with a serious health condition or who needs transitional or end of life care

Nine states and DC have already passed paid leave laws and it is beyond time for Maryland to join them in providing this critical resource to working families and businesses. JUFJ played a leading role in getting Paid Family and Medical Leave passed in Washington, DC in 2016. We are proud that, as a result, 10,000 working people were able to take paid leave over the past year, during a pandemic, when they needed it most.

The Time to Care Act

The Time to Care Act, which is the proposed legislation in Maryland, would be funded by joint employer and employee contributions to a statewide insurance fund. This insurance fund will then pay an employee's wages during leave, rather than requiring individual employers to pay directly. Sharing costs across a broad insurance pool will make Paid Family and Medical Leave affordable for both employers and employees. The proposed bill:

- Covers all Maryland workers
- Allows self-employed people to opt into the program
- Covers all employers regardless of size – employees of small businesses need leave too!
- Pays the most to people who need it most – everyone receives a percentage of their normal earnings when they take leave, but low-wage workers will receive the highest percentage; this is essential to their ability to afford time away from work and to make this policy equitable
- Offers up to 12 weeks of leave and allows workers to take the time off as one leave, or as intermittent leave, however the time is needed
- Includes all kinds of families – it is important that our program covers LGBTQ, single-parent, and multi-generational families, and defines family and family relations broadly
- Guarantees job protection for everyone working – no one should be fired for taking paid leave

The Time to Care Act – or a previous similar bill – has been submitted in the Maryland General Assembly every year for nearly a decade. The Paid Family and Medical Leave program it creates would cover up to several million people across the state, ensuring that everyone who works can take paid leave when they need to care for themselves or their family.

Our legislation is modeled on the successful state family and medical leave programs currently in place in other states and DC, with key changes rooted in solid research on where those programs fail to serve vulnerable low-income families. Through this program, Maryland will become an innovative leader in meeting the needs of employees and employers alike – at a time when the United States is the only developed nation in the world that does not guarantee universal paid parental leave and workers need access to paid leave more than ever.

The Time to Care Campaign

JUFJ is a member of the Time to Care Coalition, which includes our local allies in the labor and economic justice community as well as local and national partners across the women's, labor, racial justice, health, and reproductive justice movements, as well as small businesses. According to 2021 polling, 88% of Maryland voters support the creation of a paid leave program and the coalition is working to build on this broad support to get the Time to Care Act passed in the upcoming legislative session, which begins in January 2022.²

Our legislation and campaign have strong support among many state legislators and many small businesses, but we also face strong opposition from some corporate interests and business lobbyists. The legislation is now entering a critical phase, as the 2022 legislative session is the final year in the current term. The final details of the program are critically important in determining who will be able to take leave and under what circumstances. We need strong voices to speak out to prevent watered-down legislation that will enable high-wage workers to get leave while making it nearly impossible for low-wage workers to do so.

Our campaign includes more than 80 businesses and organizations that have signed on in support of this legislation. The Time to Care Coalition, with the support of many of JUFJ's volunteer leaders, is primed to engage business owners, nonprofit executives, low-wage workers, and a diverse group of residents from across Maryland to call upon legislators to acknowledge the many needs and challenges that a Paid Family and Medical Leave program would address. 2022 is the year to pass the Time to Care Act and make Paid Family and Medical Leave a reality in Maryland!

² [Maryland Poll Findings: Paid Family & Medical Leave](#)

Resources

JUFJ Campaign Resources

- JUFJ PFML resource page: [Paid Family and Medical Leave - Resources](#)
- 2021 one-pager: [PFML - MDGA 2021 Issue 1 Pager](#)

National Partner Resources

- National Partnership for Women and Families: [Paid Leave](#)
- [Family Values @ Work](#)
- [Paid Leave for All](#)

Time to Care Coalition Resources

- Time to Care Coalition website: [Time to Care Maryland](#)
- [Time to Care Act bill summary](#)
- [Maryland Polling - 88% of Marylanders support PFML](#)
- [Time to Care Act FAQs](#)

Business-Specific Resources

- [Maryland Center on Economic Policy one-pager](#)
- Small Business for Paid Leave Coalition website: [Small Business for Paid Leave](#)

Equity Analysis Resources

- [National Partnership for Women & Families, PFML: A Racial Justice Issue – and Opportunity](#)
- [Maryland Center on Economic Policy equity impact analysis](#)

Other Jewish and Interfaith Resources

- Jewish Labor Committee Text Source Sheet (see especially Section F - Sick and Disability Pay): [Labor Rights in the Jewish Tradition](#)
- Articles about the need for Paid Leave from a Jewish perspective:
 - [What Do We Need? Paid Family Leave. When Do We Need It? Now!](#)
 - [The Jewish Reason I Fight for Paid Family Leave – Kveller](#)
 - [Once a dream, paid parental leave now a reality at 100 Jewish groups - and counting](#)
- [Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice labor justice text studies](#)

About Jews United for Justice

It is not on you to finish the work. But you can't quit either. (Pirkei Avot 2:21)

Justice is a Jewish value. Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) advances economic, racial, and social justice in Maryland and DC by educating and mobilizing Jews across our region. We work on issue-based campaigns that make real, immediate, and concrete improvements in people's lives, and build the power of poor and working-class people and communities of color. JUFJ is a proud and valued partner in multiracial, multifaith, and cross-class coalitions. We offer Jewish learning and political education; training on how to fight racism, antisemitism, and other oppressions; holiday and social events; and leadership coaching to our community.

JUFJ Campaigns in Maryland

Paid Family and Medical Leave: Nobody should have to choose between their job and caring for their family. Nearly everyone needs time away from work at some point to care for a relative, deal with a serious personal illness, or welcome a baby, but many Marylanders can't afford to take unpaid leave. Our sage Hillel taught that we can't separate ourselves from our community; we all have a responsibility for each other's wellbeing and care. We must make sure that all people can take time to be with their families and attend to their own health.

Immigrant Rights: All people have a right to be safe and to thrive in our state, regardless of immigration status or documentation. Our tradition teaches that it is our responsibility to welcome migrants. Jews have had to flee in order to save our lives and the lives of our children many times in our history, and have been seen as foreigners in the places we have called home for centuries. We are currently working to end state government collaboration with ICE, prevent the use of private immigration detention centers, and protect the private data of undocumented Marylanders.

Court & Prison Reform: JUFJ is guided by the Jewish value of *tzelem elohim*, that all people are created in the divine image, with inherent and equal dignity and value. All people should be treated with dignity and respect. Black and brown people, people experiencing homelessness, those in poverty, and young people face marginalization and are often at risk of entering the justice system. We support decriminalization; prevention of unjust incarceration, and decarceration, helping people return to their families and communities from a place of incarceration.

Renters' Rights: The Torah obligates us to preserve our own life and health and that of others. We are taught that all people should have *dei machsoro*, resources sufficient for each person's needs (Deut. 15:7-8). Safe and stable housing has far reaching economic, health, and social benefits to individuals, families, and communities, and is key to reducing racial inequities. We are working to prevent evictions and the extreme threat to health resulting from homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To learn more, email matan@jufj.org or elianna@jufj.org.

**JEW'S UNITED
FOR JUSTICE**

Take Action with JUFJ

As Maryland residents, business owners, and workers, we can make real change in our community – but only if we raise our voices and advocate for what’s right. From holding an event to spreading the word on social media, emailing an elected official, or meeting with government officials, there are many ways to engage with JUFJ’s Maryland campaigns. No commitment is too small!

1. **Stay Informed:** Visit jufj.org/email and sign up for our newsletter to get updates about labor justice in Maryland, as well as our other campaigns and programs.
2. **Host an educational meeting for your community:** Invite JUFJ to speak (virtually or in person) at your synagogue or community group or host a meeting for interested friends. These meetings give participants a supportive space to learn about the issues and take action.
3. **Organize your congregation:** Work with a team of volunteers from your congregation to mobilize fellow members to write letters, make phone calls, meet with legislators, and more.
4. **Lobby your elected officials in Annapolis:** Join other JUFJ volunteers online and in Annapolis for legislator meetings, hearings, rallies, social media actions, and our annual Annapolis Action Night.
5. **Meet with an organizer:** Have coffee with a JUFJ staff member or volunteer leader to learn more about our work and how you can make a difference.

If you are interested in any of these options, email matan@jufj.org or elianna@jufj.org.

Upcoming Events:

Paid Family and Medical Leave Workgroup (meets every other week)

- Join other JUFJers who are working to grow the PFML campaign and build power across Maryland to get the Time to Care Act passed in 2022!

Maryland Statewide Legislative Kickoff: Sunday, October 17 at 2:00 PM

- As the Jewish year begins with the High Holidays, so does the Maryland legislative year here at JUFJ. Join us on Zoom for our statewide legislative kickoff, your chance to get to know the campaigns JUFJ is working on in 2022, meet other JUFJers in your state district, and learn about the ways we plan to work for justice together!

To RSVP for these and other upcoming events, visit jufj.org/events.

JEWES UNITED
FOR JUSTICE