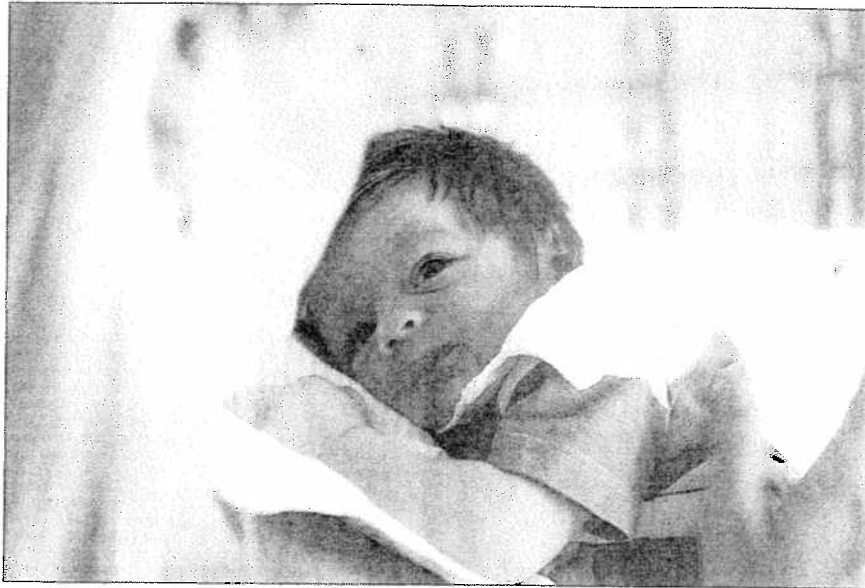


The Post-Standard  
**CN****NY**



**KRISTEN HENNESSEY** is home on family leave with her son, Braeden, born June 4. Federal law allows her 12 weeks of unpaid leave for the birth, but she plans to return to work before then because she can't afford to stay out that long. Michelle Gabel / Staff photographer

**By Gina Chen**  
 Family Life editor

When Kristin Hennessey, of DeWitt, returns to work Aug. 6, her baby will be 9 weeks old.

She couldn't stay home with him longer — mainly because she couldn't afford to go without pay to take advantage of the whole 12 weeks of unpaid leave allowed by the federal Medical and Family Leave Act. For her, paid family leave may have made a difference.

"I would have definitely considered taking longer leave if I knew I'd still have income," Hennessey says. "They're just so dependent at this stage that you really want to be home and be there for them and make sure they are getting what they need."

A proposal in the state Legislature would provide up to 12 weeks of disability pay for men or women after the birth of a child, an adoption, a foster care placement or for a family illness. A federal plan calls for up to eight weeks of paid leave on a sliding scale, with full pay for the poorest workers.

Now, the only paid time most people can get to care for a new baby is approximately six weeks of disability for women after giving birth. Workers get up to \$170 a week disability pay, although some employers pay the rest of the salary.

The state legislative session closed for summer without deciding on paid family leave. But Gov. Eliot Spitzer has been traveling the state, urging lawmakers to return to the Capitol to act on the measure, along with other bills. He sees paid family leave as a priority, "so families will not have to choose work obligations over families," says the governor's press officer, Christine Pritchard.

But the Manufacturers Association of Central New York worries providing paid leave may encourage some work-

ers to bilk the system, says Anne Kassel, vice president of human resource services for MACNY, which has 300 member businesses that represent 55,000 employees. Member companies say some workers already abuse unpaid leave, asking for a day of unpaid leave to take a relative to the hospital, for example, and spending most of it at leisure, she says.

She says MACNY isn't opposed to people using leave who really need it — for an ill child or after childbirth. But MACNY says employees must justify their need more to prevent abuse.

## A LITTLE TIME WITH **BABY**

**A family leave act that includes some pay would allow new parents to take more time off upon their children's arrival.**



### ON THE WEB

Read the Family Life blog at <http://blog.syracuse.com/family/> to comment on this story, share your experience or get more information on current leave policies and what's proposed.

"It's just difficult because there's always those who take advantage of policies and take every opportunity to take more time off," Kassel says. "This would just incentivize them to take more time off because they're being paid."

The Business Council of New York State, which has 3,200 members statewide, opposes paid leave, saying it will hurt businesses, especially smaller ones. Employees should work out with their employer what time off they need

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# Juggling Time, Money

## JUGGLING, FROM PAGE D-1

to care for their families, without the additional mandate of paid family leave, says Tom Minnick, the council's vice president for human resources.

"We think this is such a proposal that would put businesses, especially smaller businesses, in New York state in a less favorable competitive position," Minnick says.

**For Gina L. Rivers**, of Cicero, paid family leave would have meant she could have afforded to stay home longer after childbirth. When her first child was born prematurely, her employer augmented her disability pay for six weeks, so she could afford to take six additional weeks unpaid.

But by the time babies two and three came along, she had a new job where she received only partial disability pay for six weeks after childbirth. That meant she had to return to work as a corporate trainer for Total Care Inc. when the pay ended.

She had pre-term labor with her fourth child, born March 23, so she took days totaling seven weeks off before his birth. She returned to work five weeks after he was born, as she recovered from a Caesarean section. It's hard emotionally and physically to go back to work so soon, she says.

"Even if you know they're going to be in the care of your spouse or another person, you get into this planning mood," says Rivers, whose older children are ages 10, 3 and 2. "Did I spend enough time? Did I make enough bottles? When you're in the workplace, most places aren't friendly enough to give you time to take care of these things."

**Sara Holmes**, of Syracuse, points out that paid family leave would be particularly beneficial to parents who adopt. Many employers offer no paid time off for adoptions, though many international adoptions require that parents travel to a foreign country to pick up their child. Some adoption agencies require that at least one parent be home with the child for the early months.

Plus, the cost of adoptions may come after years of money spent on unsuccessful fertility treatments; as was the case with Holmes and her husband, David Greenfeld. They paid about \$15,000 to adopt each of their two sons from Korea.

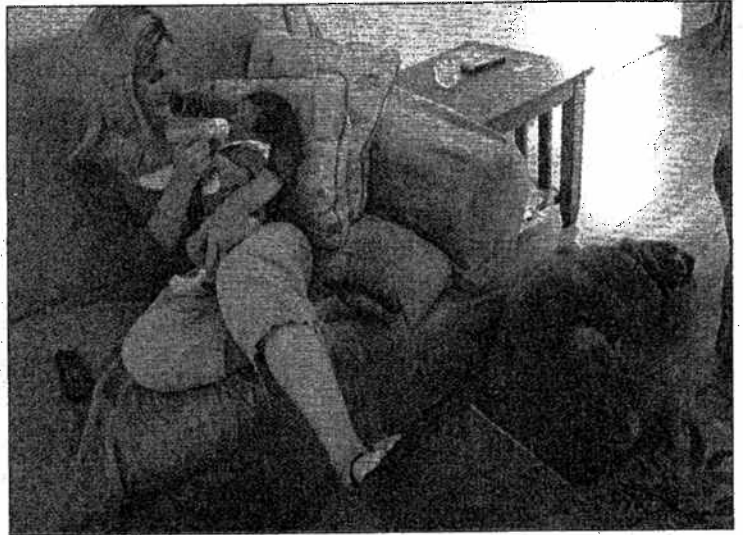
Holmes says she was atypical. Her employer, the Onondaga County Health Department, held her job for six months after she adopted each of the boys, who are now 12 and 11.

She got some pay for the first leave and for about a month of the second leave, using sick time and vacation, but she ended up taking five months off unpaid during the second leave.

Paid family leave would have made it easier to manage temporarily on her husband's salary and money they had saved. And it would help families whose employers aren't as generous, she says.

**"We were very lucky,"** Holmes says.

Hennessey, a campaign manager for the Central New York chapter of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, says she too is fortunate compared with many women. Her employer augmented her disability pay in full during six of the eight weeks of her disability following a C-section delivery and in part for two more weeks. She'll use accumulated vacation for the last week before she returns to work.



Michelle Gabel / Staff photographer

**KRISTEN HENNESSEY** says she is lucky compared to many working mothers. Her employer augmented her disability pay in full during six of the eight weeks after her C-section delivery, and in part for two more.

But she wishes lawmakers knew how overwhelming caring for a newborn can be. She nurses every two or three hours or more frequently. Sleep is often measured in minutes, not hours. She wants to continue breast-feeding when she returns to work because of the health benefits to her infant, but she knows that will be a challenge on the job.

"It's just unfortunate because we take the lead in so many social and economic issues in the world, but when it comes to our families and taking care of our

families, it seems the government really falls short," Hennessey says.

Gina Chen can be reached at [gchen@syracuse.com](mailto:gchen@syracuse.com) or 470-2172. Read her blog at: <http://blog.syracuse.com/family/>.

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### Frequently asked questions

**What's proposed?** A state bill would provide up to 12 weeks of disability pay for men and women after the birth of a child, adoption or foster-care placement or to care for a seriously ill family member. An employee payroll deduction now used to pay for disability pay would increase to pay for this benefit. Workers who take the leave would be paid the current disability pay rate, which is half a worker's wage, up to \$170 per week. It passed the Assembly June 22, and advocates hope the Senate will act on it at a special legislative session this month.

A federal bill would provide workers up to eight weeks of paid leave after the birth of a child or adoption or to care for a seriously ill immediate family member or for their own serious illness. Pay would be based on a sliding scale, with lower-paid workers making a higher percentage of their pay. Employees, employers and the government would share the cost.

**What's provided now:** The federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 provides job security for up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for men or women in one year for eligible employees. It's for the birth of a child, adoption or a foster care placement or to care for a seriously ill family member or for the worker's own serious illness.

**What about disability after childbirth?** Women now can receive disability pay before or after giving birth for medical necessity. In general, women get six weeks after a normal delivery, and eight weeks after a Caesarean section, but the length of disability varies depending on the women's medical situation.

**How many other countries have paid family leave?** Worldwide, 168 countries offer guaranteed leave with income to women after childbirth, out of 173 countries studied. Ninety-eight countries offer 14 or more weeks of paid leave. Of those studies, the only countries that don't offer paid leave in addition to the United States are: Lesotho, Liberia, Papua New Guinea and Swaziland.

**What about other states?** California is near its third anniversary of offering paid family leave, and Washington state approved paid family leave this year.

**Sources:** U.S. Department of Labor Web site; U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd's Web site; the Work, Family and Equity Index study by Harvard and McGill universities; state Senate and Assembly Web sites; Stephen Powers, counsel for state Sen. Thomas P. Morahan; and the New York Paid Family Leave Coalition.

### A supporter says ...

"The first year of life is so key in terms of brain development and personality development. And there's no one better to be with their child during this time than the parent. Certainly, the other industrialized nations of the world recognize this."

— Donna Dolan, chair of New York Paid Family Leave Coalition



Al Campanie / Staff photographer

**SARA HOLMES, of Syracuse,** says many employers offer no paid time off for adoptions, although many international adoptions require the parents to travel abroad.

### A critic says ...

"The small-business concern is basically the additional cost as a result of replacement workers. Usually, there will be existing workers who will fill the gaps, generally in a mandatory overtime situation. ... It's somewhat of a morale issue."

— Tom Minnick, vice president for human resources for the Business Council of New York State



Stanley Walker / Staff photographer

**GINA RIVERS, of Cicero,** notes how hard it is emotionally for new mothers who have to return to work, worrying whether they are spending enough time with the child.