

**1.28.2020 HOUSE WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE HEARING**

Good morning, Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today on behalf of the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act – and to share my experiences with you NOT ONLY as a working mother, caregiver, and cancer survivor... but also as someone who, because of my profession in the public eye, has spoken to thousands of Americans who must care for a loved one on a daily basis.

My name is Joan Lunden. I am a journalist. I am an advocate for women, family, and caregiving issues. I am a wife. A mother to seven children. And I was a caregiver to my late mother who suffered from dementia, as well as to my late brother, who suffered from the many complications of Type II Diabetes. Thus, I am a part of the “Sandwich Generation,” caring for children at the same time as caring for aging parents, all while holding down a full-time job.

Because of my personal experience, I strongly believe that a national paid family and medical leave policy should address the full range of caregiving needs, and not only the needs of new parents.

However, I’ll start there... For me, the juggling act of being a working mom began in 1980 when I started my duties as host of Good Morning America, just SEVEN weeks after having my first child. But I was fortunate. I worked for a company that not only gave me time off when my daughters were born, but ... when I returned to work, I was privileged to be one of the first working women in this country, to be allowed to bring my infant daughter to work with me.

At that time, perks like that were highly unusual. And perhaps it was having the good fortune to be in that wonderful position -- that lit

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the fire in me to embark on a path as a women's and family advocate and do my part to help families get the support they need.

I was inundated with boxes of mail at the network from women who wrote-in to say they too needed help but had no leverage or access to any kind of a safety net.

Things have improved of course, since 1980 -- the Family and Medical Leave Act was passed -- -- but of course that is unpaid leave and it doesn't cover all caregiving. Some states have passed their own "comprehensive paid leave" policies. And more companies are now offering versions of their own paid leave to their employees. However, the vast majority of families in the U.S. still don't have access to paid family and medical leave.

In fact, as I understand it, fewer than half of American workers currently have access to employer-provided medical leave, and less than 20% receive paid parental or caregiving leave through their employers.

Statistics show that 1 in 4 moms in this country returns to work just **10 days after childbirth** - even though all the research tells us that "time off after giving birth" results in improved health outcomes for both babies and parents, both physically and mentally.

Our world today is quite different from what many of us may remember as kids -- where extended families tended to all live close together and were available to provide each other with support when it was needed. Today's world is a mobile one and families are dispersed. Young men and women often move far away from their homes to find education and work, which of course leaves both the older parents and the growing young families far apart... and very much alone and without support when a crisis occurs.



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For working women, it is an especially delicate juggling act, parenting their children, trying to be a good employee and often these days, also caring for aging parents. And if a woman has to leave her job, she can get knocked right off the career ladder. Once that happens, it is not easy to get back into the job market, and often they have to start at the bottom again. The end result? The lack of access to paid leave forces talented, hard-working employees to drop out of the labor force entirely. **It makes no sense, for employee or employer.**

We are in the middle of a caregiving crisis, and it's a problem that is only going to grow. Experts say that our aging population will double in the next 20 years.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services about half of Americans turning 65 today will develop a disability serious enough that they will require care. That means that the number of American workers who will need personal medical leave or will need to leave to care for aging parents, spouses, and other family members is only going to increase.

Every day in this country, 10,000 baby boomers retire. This means that more adult children will be in the position of caring for their children and at the same time, caring for their aging parents.

More often than not, it has always been women, middle age women, who've taken on the caregiving duties, However, millennials are now increasingly the ones to take on the responsibility of balancing family caregiving and working. And this has the potential to stop their careers dead in their tracks, right as they have just only begun.

Millions of families are struggling with how to make ends meet caring for their families and also taking care of their senior relatives.

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That's why I believe so strongly that any paid leave policy should address the full range of caregiving needs families face.

I think it's fair to say that we all will have to give or receive care at some point in our lives. And let's face it, there is no good time for a health crisis: whether it's emergency back surgery, caring for a dying parent, or in my case, to get treatment for breast cancer.

I will tell you that when you hear those words "You have cancer" you feel almost paralyzed, your life is in the balance, and you must attend to your health. However, you also still want to work... you want to keep your job. These are the times we feel most vulnerable... and need that safety net so that we can tend to our health without worrying about our financial security.

I think that people want to work and pay their bills and support their families, but far too many end up going into debt and falling into poverty or bankruptcy because they have no safety net. They shouldn't lose their jobs... simply for having a baby or caring for a family member. **We need to support families and we need people to stay engaged in the workforce.**

I am thankful that throughout my life, I had support from my employer early on in my career and that I had support from my family when I recently faced a cancer battle. But my heart goes out to the many families that I hear from who are facing financial ruin in their time of crisis... some of them losing not only their jobs, but even their homes as well. Having financial stability in these trying times would mean everything to these families

We all get sick, and we all need to care for our children, and our parents and our spouses may need us and none of us wants to choose

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between caring for ourselves or our families and paying the house payment and the electric bill.

A few short weeks would give time to bond with a new baby, a chance to say goodbye to a loved one and peace of mind to care for yourself in life's most challenging times. Paid Family and Medical Leave will support families.... **and also, employers, since they won't have to lose workers when life happens.**

In the end, not having to make that choice between income and caring for our loved ones, will make us all stronger, both at work and at home.

So, I appreciate that this committee is taking up the urgent need for paid leave policies that would support families in their time of need. Families everywhere are counting on Congress to adopt this kind of comprehensive paid leave program that will help us all when we need it the most.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify.



## Joan Lunden Bio

An award-winning journalist, bestselling author, motivational speaker, and women's health & wellness advocate, Joan Lunden has been a trusted voice in American homes for more than 30 years. For nearly two decades, Lunden greeted viewers each morning on *Good Morning America* bringing insight to the day's top stories. As the longest running female host ever on early morning television, Lunden reported from 26 countries, covered 5 presidents, 5 Olympics, and kept Americans up to date on how to care for their homes, their families, and their health.

Today, Lunden continues to be one of America's most recognized and trusted personalities. Lunden is a sought-after speaker and event host throughout the country, the host of the CBS series *Your Health*, and recently, served as a special correspondent on the *TODAY Show*. On her website [JoanLunden.com](http://JoanLunden.com) and social media, women interact with her every day about health, wellness, lifestyle tips, family, and boomer information.

As a part of the sandwich generation, Lunden's demographic is far-reaching. She is a mother of 7 including two sets of teenage twins. Like many Boomers in America she has juggled being a working mom while caring for an aging parent, and brings this experience to her role as the spokesperson for the nation's leading senior referral service, [A Place for Mom](http://APlaceforMom.com), a company helping caregivers and families find the right care and resources for their loved one.

In June of 2014, Lunden was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer, which required chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation. An eternal optimist, Lunden wanted to turn her diagnosis into an opportunity to help others. She blogged throughout her cancer treatment and wrote a memoir *Had I Known*, which documents her battle, and reflects on her life and career. Lunden advocates for patients on Capitol Hill, and actively communicates with the cancer community through her social media and on her website.

One of the most visible women in America, Lunden has graced the covers of more than 60 magazines and book covers. Lunden's next book, *Why Did I Come into This Room; A Candid Conversation About Aging* will hit stands March 10<sup>th</sup>.

Lunden has served as national spokesperson for various organizations such as The American Heart Association, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, The American Lung Association, The American Red Cross, The American Academy of Pediatrics, and The Colon Cancer Alliance.

Joan Lunden's books include *Had I Known*; *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Family Caregiving*; *Growing Up Healthy: Protecting Your Child From Diseases Now Through Adulthood*; *Wake-Up Calls*; *A Bend in the Road is Not the End of the Road*; *Joan Lunden's Healthy Living*; *Joan Lunden's Healthy Cooking*; *Mother's Minutes*; *Your Newborn Baby*; and *Good Morning, I'm Joan Lunden*. She also hosts the exercise video *Workout America*.

**Joan Lunden truly exemplifies today's modern working woman.**