

Donna Price
Cleveland, OH

Donna Price is a travel nurse in Cleveland, Ohio. She has worked in the medical field for 20 years. She is a mother of three: a 34-year-old daughter who is a social worker, a 28-year-old son who is a police officer, and an 18-year-old son who just graduated high school and has autism. Donna also cares for her mother, who had a stroke and is disabled. She is an avid reader and enjoys biking. Donna is a proud member of MomsRising.

Testimony of Donna Price
House Ways and Means Committee Hearing
The Burnout Epidemic and What Working Women Need for A Stronger Economy
June 15, 2022

Good morning Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, and members of the committee. My name is Donna Price and I live in Cleveland, Ohio. I am a nurse and a mom of three: two adult children and an 18-year-old son who has autism. I also care for my mother, who is disabled, and I'm a proud member of MomsRising.

Trying to balance working full-time, paying my bills, and caring for my mother and son has never been easy, and the pandemic has created enormous new challenges. Without a basic care infrastructure in place that includes paid family and medical leave, my career has suffered and my family has struggled. I appreciate the opportunity to share my story today.

During the pandemic, I've faced impossible choices again and again. As a nurse, I have felt the full weight of COVID's strain on our nation's health care system. My colleagues and I have worked tirelessly, day in and day out, risking our own health to keep our hospital running and our patients cared for. At times, I was working 72 hours per week.

At the same time, my own family struggled. The pandemic has been especially hard for my son. He has autism and thrives on routine, but when COVID hit, everything changed. He struggled with his mental health and needed constant supervision and care. As a mother, it's been extremely painful and upsetting to watch him struggle.

I can't tell you how many times my child care plan for him has fallen through and I've been forced to leave work early or take days off to care for him. Especially without paid leave, it's incredibly stressful. Thankfully, his school had a child care program onsite, although it was expensive. But in early 2021, both his school and his aftercare program went remote because of a COVID surge.

I had no choice but to take eight weeks off from work to care for him. He was contemplating suicide and needed someone who could address his needs day and night. I had recently started a new job and I hadn't accrued any paid time off. So my leave was entirely unpaid. For eight weeks, I had zero income.

Of course, I still had bills to pay. We were in a financial crisis. I struggled to pay rent, put gas in my car, buy groceries and pay for my mom's medications. I was facing \$2,000 in unpaid gas bills and \$800 in unpaid electric bills. We only made it through with help from my older son and daughter, a social worker and a police officer. Otherwise, I don't know what we would have done.

I managed to return to work at the hospital for several months. But in July 2021, my child care plan fell through once more, and my son's mental health again took a turn for the worse. Once again, I had to choose between caring for my son when he needed me most and maintaining my financial security.

I took several more weeks of unpaid leave. I was exhausted and stressed, and I hit a breaking point. Without basic supports like paid family and medical leave, it just wasn't possible for me to work full-time while caring for my mom and my son.

I made the incredibly tough decision to leave my job and to take a position as a contract nurse, which provides more flexibility. So today, I work about 36 hours a week through a staffing agency. Of course, that comes with its own challenges. My income is lower, and I no longer get health insurance through my employer, so I have to pay for it out of pocket. I still don't have paid leave, and especially with the rising cost of essentials like food and gas, it's really hard to make ends meet.

Like so many working moms across the country, I'm tired. I'm tired of working so hard day after day and still worrying about the bills. I'm tired of making impossible choices and robbing Peter to pay Paul. I'm tired of struggling because our country hasn't invested in the care infrastructure that moms, families, caregivers, and our economy need to thrive.

My family is counting on Congress to take action and build an economy that works for all of us. That means investing in child care, home- and community-based services for people with disabilities, and paid family and medical leave for all. If I knew I had 12 weeks of guaranteed paid family and medical leave, it would be life changing. My career would look so much different, and my stress levels would be manageable. It would open up so many opportunities for my son and me.

I know so many working women can relate to my story. As moms, essential workers, and caregivers for elderly parents, we go out every day and do what we need to do to make sure everyone else is cared for. But sometimes it feels like no one is making sure we're okay. There are days when I just want to know that my health and my financial and emotional wellbeing matter. That my elected leaders have my back. That there are policies in place that will enable me to be the best mom, caregiver and nurse I can be. That my son is going to be okay.

As you discuss the next reconciliation package, I hope you will remember my family's story and listen to the millions of working parents across the country who are crying out for change. We needed a care infrastructure before the pandemic, and we need it more than ever now. Thank you.