



## Vermont Commission on Women

### Paid Family and Medical Leave Business Survey Report

Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont- November 2016

**Executive Summary:** An online survey for Vermont business leaders was administered between September-November 2016 to a) gauge awareness and support for a number of different Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) arrangements, and b) understand current short-term and long-term leave policies offered by Vermont businesses. A total of 427 business leaders' responses were included in the data analysis, with representation from across the state in all sectors, a combination of both for-profit and nonprofit businesses, and various business sizes. Responses were somewhat split in terms of general support for a Paid Family and Medical Leave policy in Vermont, with 46.9% of businesses supportive of a statewide PFML policy for Vermont, and 40.4% not supportive of a statewide PFML policy for Vermont. When broken down into different reasons for an employee to take PFML, the greatest support was for paid leave to care for a new baby (42% of respondents were 'very supportive', while 22.5% were 'very unsupportive') and paid leave for pregnancy-related complications (42% of respondents were 'very supportive', while 18.8% were 'very unsupportive'). 40.5% were 'very supportive' of paid leave to care for one's own chronic or serious health condition (18.4% were 'very unsupportive'), and 30% were 'very supportive' of paid leave to care for a seriously ill family member (21.5% were 'very unsupportive'). In terms of current policies and practices, a greater percentage of businesses currently offer some form of paid short-term leave than those that offer paid long-term leave.

**Business survey outreach:** A survey of 30 questions was developed and programmed into Lime Survey by The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont. CRS obtained an initial mailing list of 9,900 business contacts in Vermont. The survey description and link was mailed to this list on 9/23, and a reminder email was sent on 10/7 and another reminder email was sent on 10/12. CRS purchased an additional mailing list of approximately 10,000 Vermont businesses and, removed duplicate email addresses from the first business list, and sent the survey to those businesses on 10/28 and a reminder on 11/2.

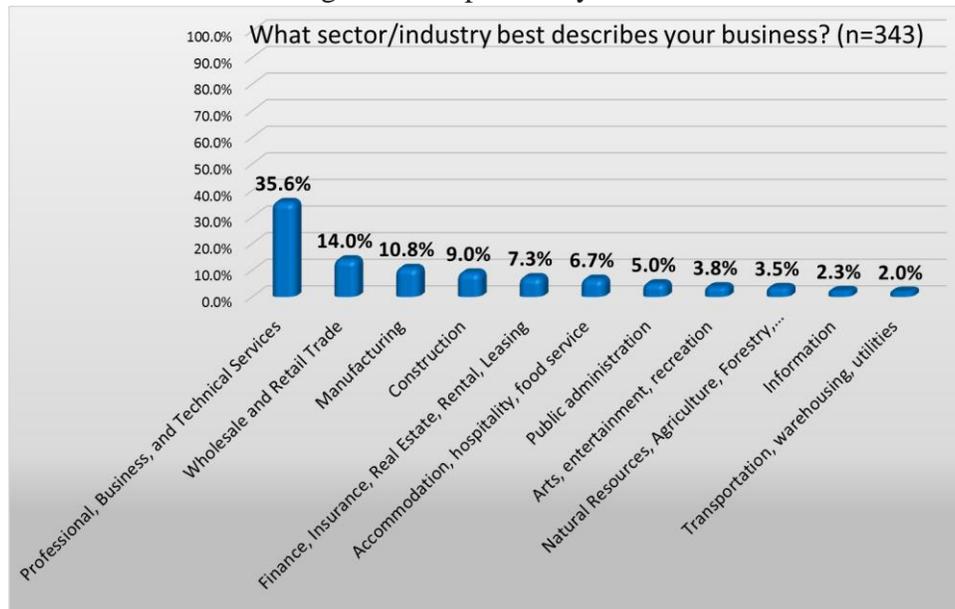
In addition, CRS reached out to business umbrella organizations to request that they share the survey with their membership. We included a script for them to use and required that they use the exact language to ensure neutrality when sharing the survey link, as well as requiring that they share the link with all members and not select certain members or groups over others. Business organizations who confirmed that they shared the survey included the following, with the number of members in their list if that information was provided: Vermont Chamber of Commerce (10,000 Vermont businesses and regional chambers), Chambers of Commerce of: Rutland, Northeast Kingdom, Lake Champlain, Brattleboro, Franklin County, Montpelier, Manchester, and Bennington, Common Good VT (4,500 nonprofit staff and affiliates), Vermont

Retail and Grocers Association (1,000 members), Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR), Main St. Alliance, Change the Story Business Peer Exchange, Let's Grow Kids business outreach team, Women's Business Owners Network, and Vermont Early Childhood Alliance. The survey description and link was mailed to these and other business umbrella organizations on 9/23, and a reminder email was sent on 10/7. We also called umbrella organizations and Chambers of Commerce to follow up and request that they share the survey.

### Business sample

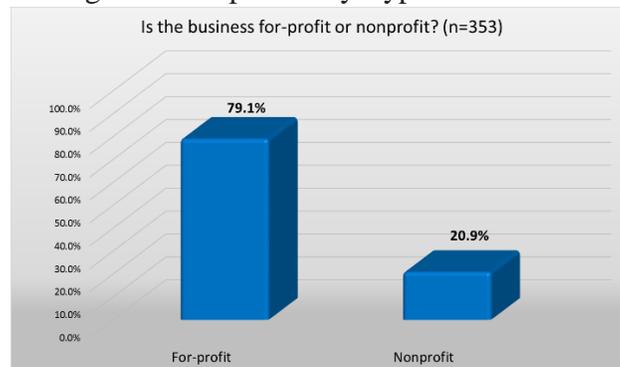
Business leaders from across the state and from every sector responded to the survey. The sector with the greatest representation, 36%, was 'Professional, Business, and Technical', followed by 14% 'Wholesale and Retail' (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Responses by Sector



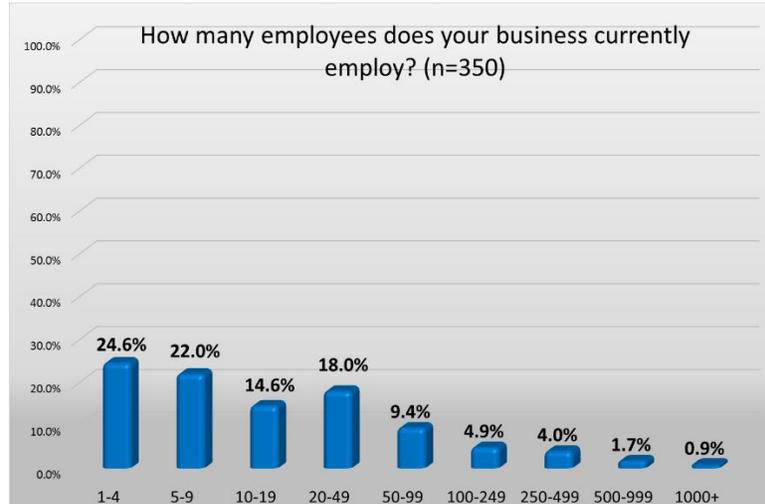
- The majority of businesses that responded to the survey, 79%, were For-Profit businesses, and 21% Nonprofit businesses responded (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Responses by Type of Business



- Over half of participating businesses (61%) were small businesses with fewer than 20 employees. Only 11.5% of participating businesses had 100 or more employees (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Responses by Business Size



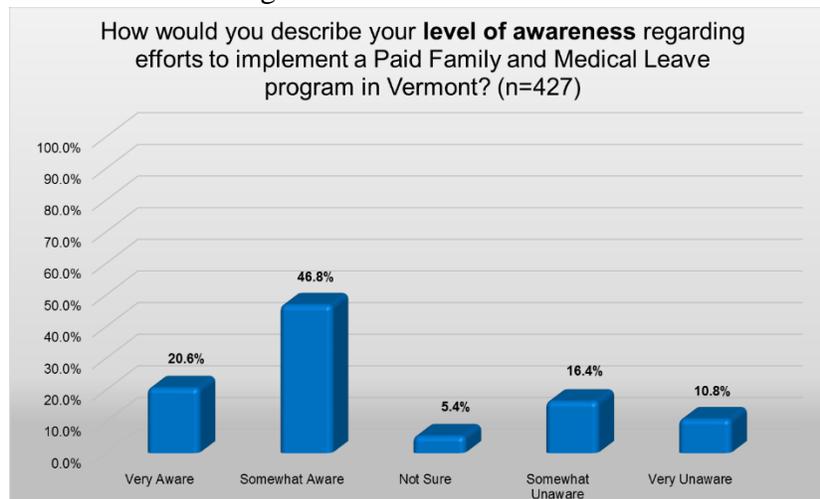
### Data deduplication

Of the 583 total responses, 156 were removed from the analysis if there were duplicate responses from the same IP address or if fewer than one-quarter of responses were filled in. We de-duplicated results by screening for multiple entries from the same IP address or the same business name and removing the responses from whichever entry had fewer questions answered.

### Key Findings

At the start of the survey, 47% of respondents were ‘somewhat aware’ regarding efforts to implement a Paid Family and Medical Leave in Vermont, and another 21% were ‘very aware’ (Figure 4).

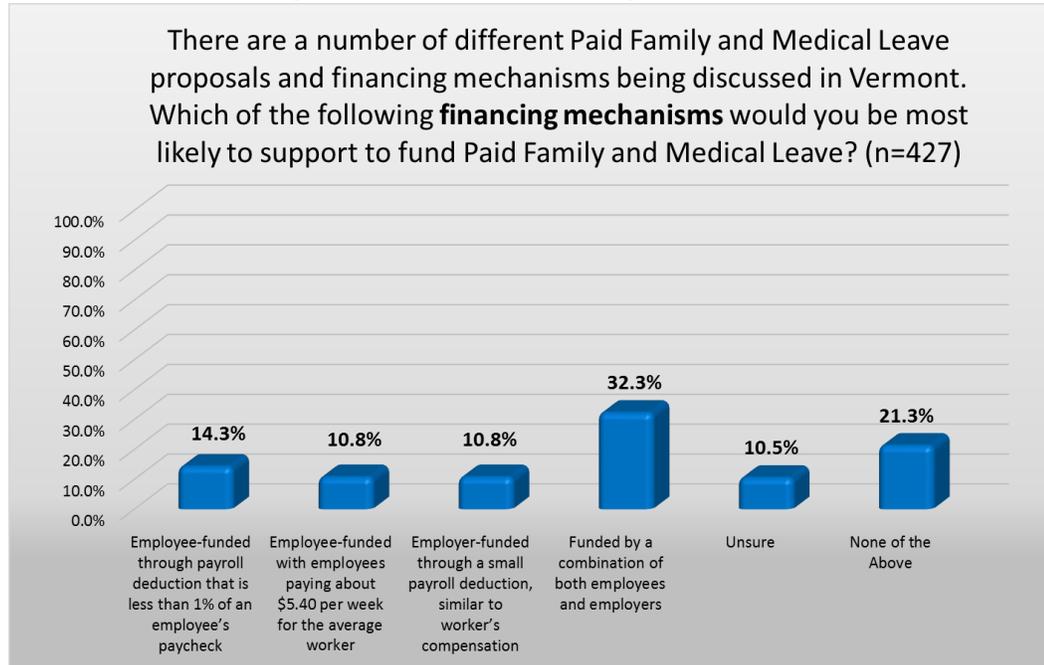
Figure 4. Level of Awareness



The following are key results regarding level of support for various types and arrangements of Paid Family and Medical Leave.

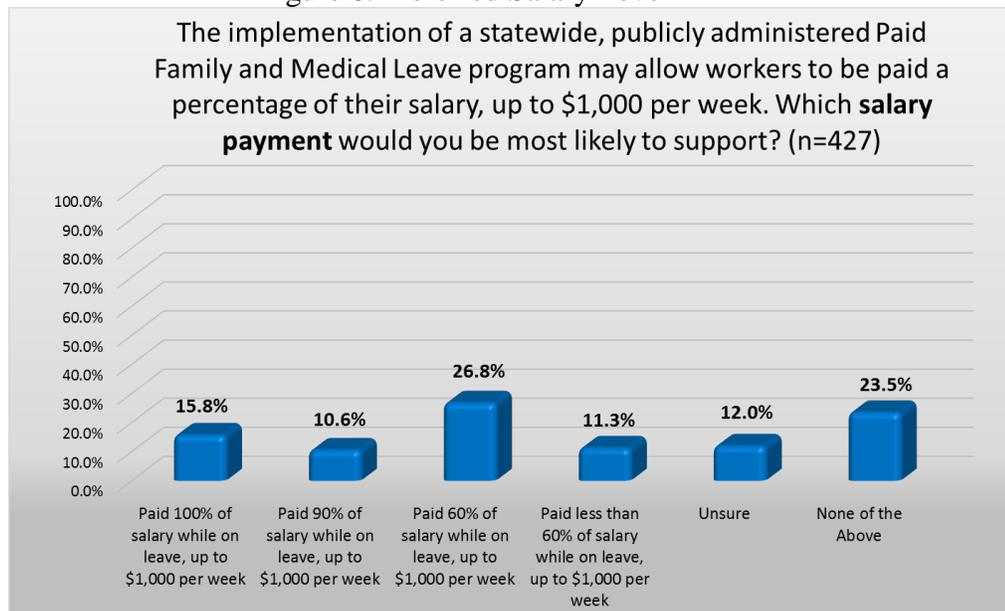
- The financing mechanism with the greatest level of support was a combination of employer- and employee-funded program (32% favored) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Preferred Financing Mechanism



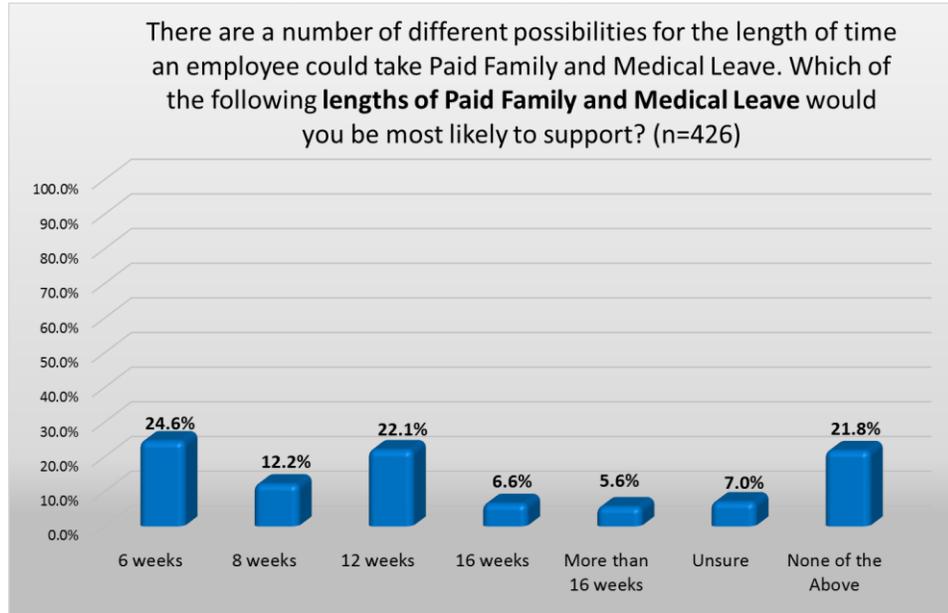
- The salary arrangement with the greatest level of support was for employees to be paid 60% of their salary up to \$1,000 per week (27% favored) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Preferred Salary Level



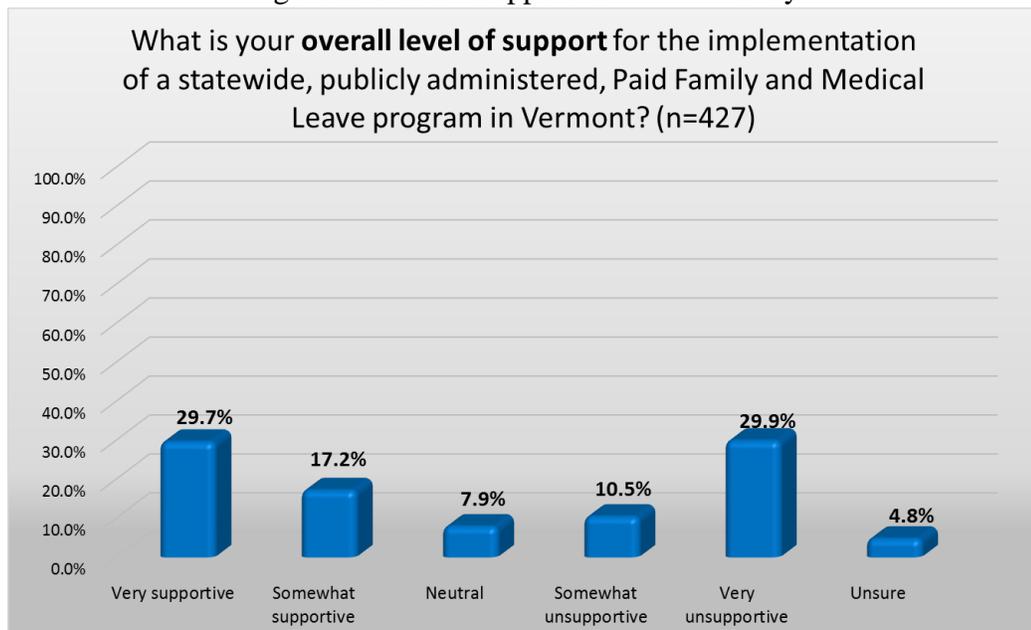
- A quarter of business respondents would be most likely to support PFML of 6 weeks, followed by 22% that would support 12 weeks of PFML, and 12.2% would support 8 weeks (Figure 7). 22% would not support any length of leave.

Figure 7. Preferred Length of Leave



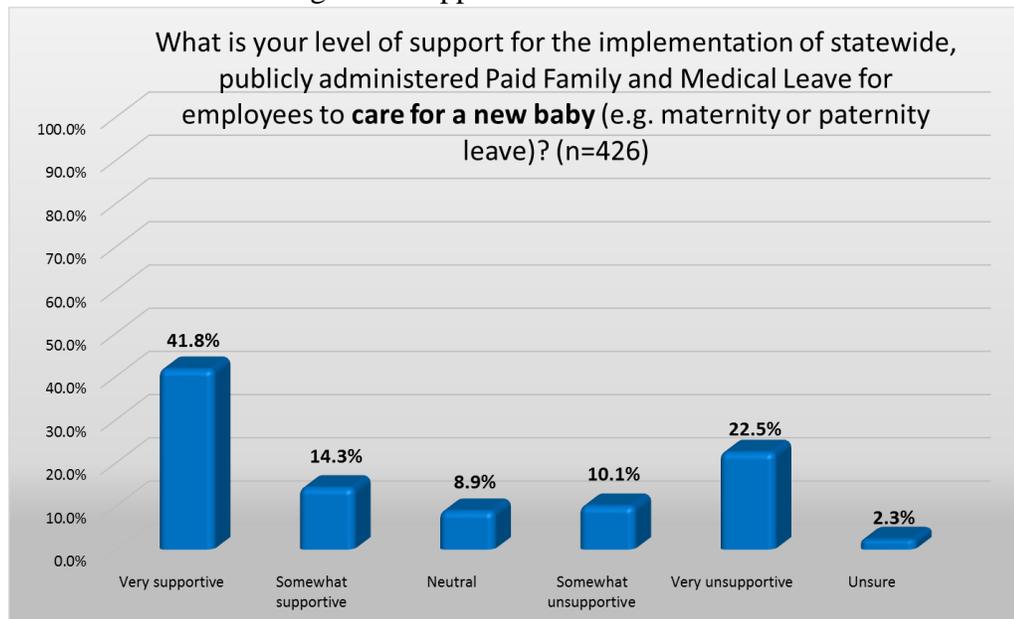
- 46.9% of businesses support a statewide PFML policy for Vermont, while 40.4% do not support a statewide PFML policy for Vermont (n=354, includes both very and somewhat supportive, and both very and somewhat unsupportive) (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Overall Support for PFML Policy



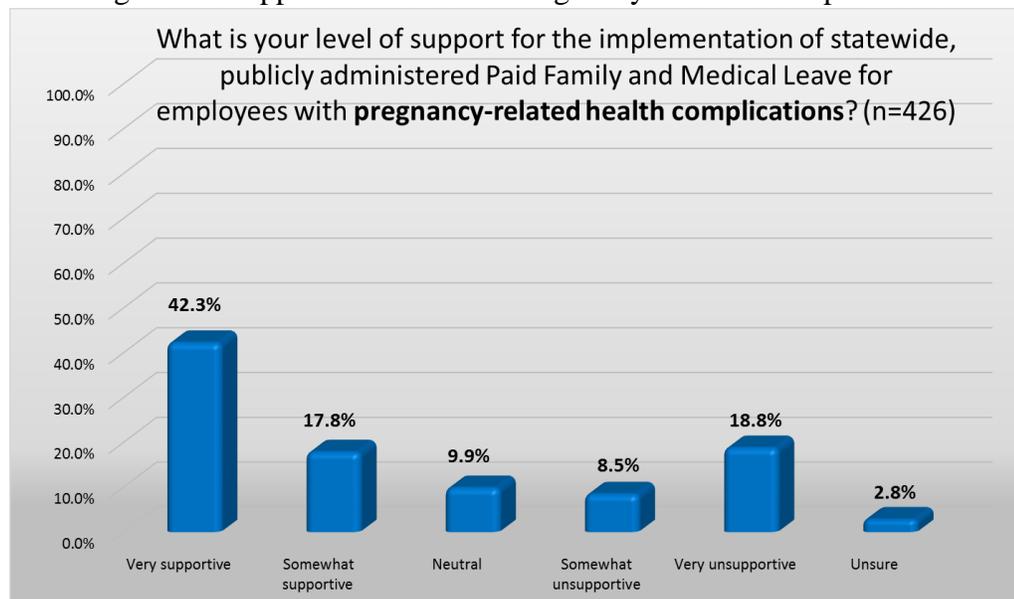
- 42% of respondents were ‘very supportive’ of paid leave to care for a new baby (22.5% were ‘very unsupportive’) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Support for Parental Leave



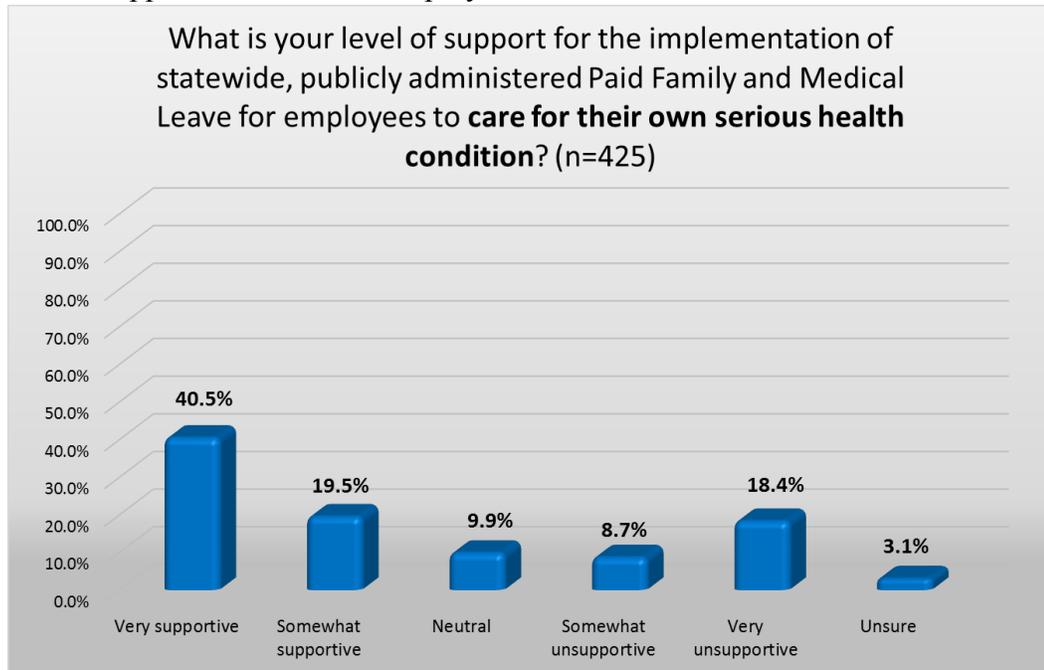
- 42% of respondents were ‘very supportive’ of paid leave for pregnancy-related complications (18.8% were ‘very unsupportive’) (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Support for Leave for Pregnancy-Related Complications



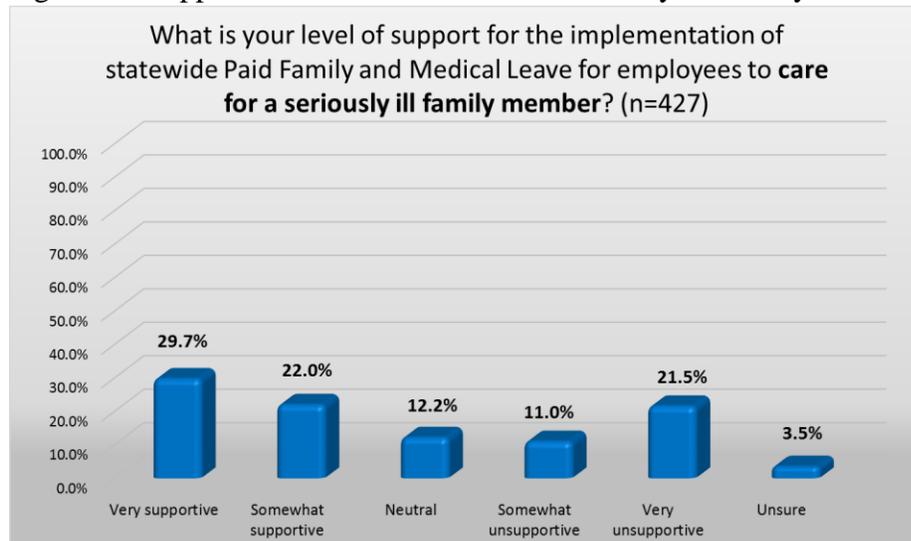
- 40.5% were ‘very supportive’ of paid leave to care for one’s own chronic or serious health condition (18.4% were ‘very unsupportive’) (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Support for Leave for Employee’s Own Chronic or Serious Health Condition



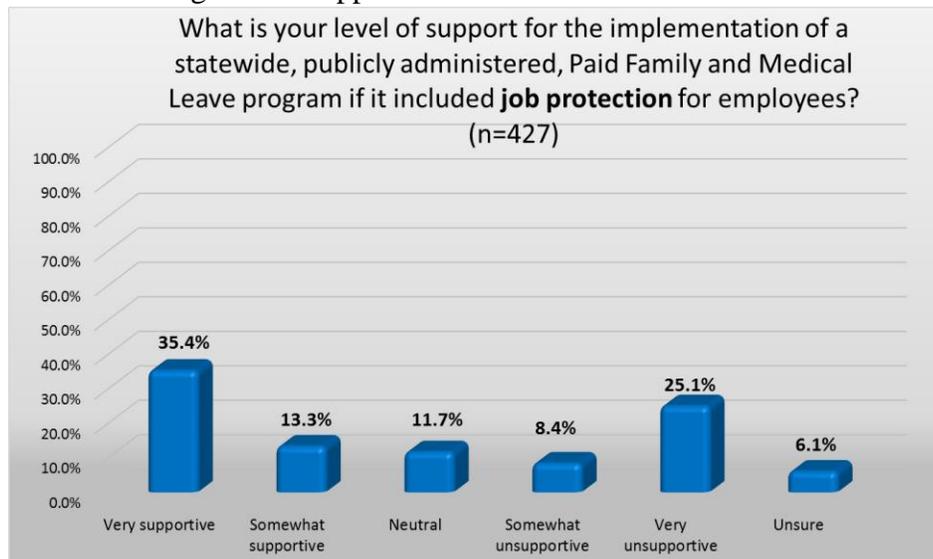
- 30% were ‘very supportive’ of paid leave to care for a seriously ill family member (21.5% were ‘very unsupportive’) (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Support for Leave to Care for a Seriously Ill Family Member



- 35% were ‘very supportive’ of paid leave if it includes job protection (25% were ‘very unsupportive’) (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Support for Leave with Job Protection



The following are key results regarding current policies and practices of businesses with respect to various types of paid and unpaid short-term and long-term leave:

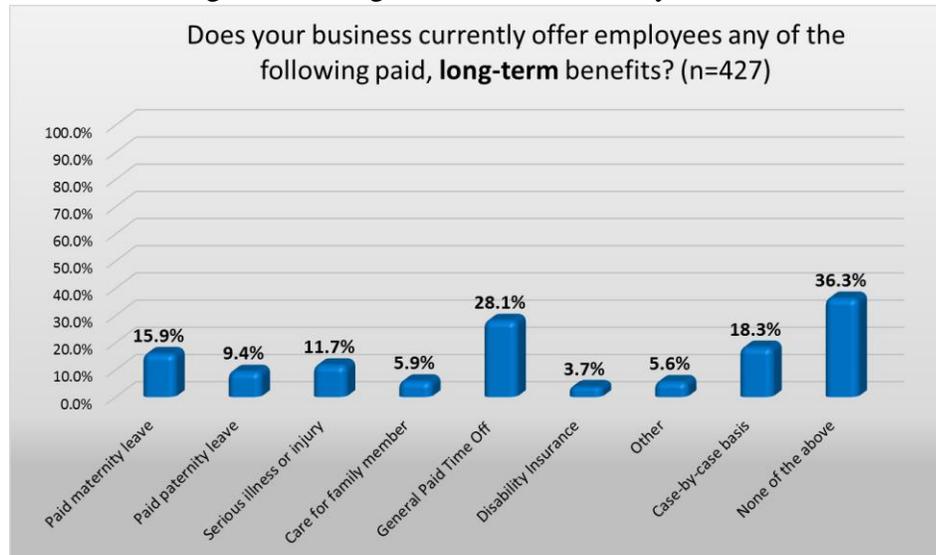
- 89% of businesses currently offer some type of paid short-term leave (Figure 14).
  - 61% offer paid vacation time
  - 53% offer paid sick days
  - 50% offer general Paid Time Off
  - 33% offer paid temporary disability insurance
  - 12% do not have a formal policy but offer paid short-term leave on a case-by-case basis

Figure 14. Short-term Leave Currently Offered



- 64% of businesses currently offer some type of paid long-term leave (Figure 15).
  - General Paid Time Off is the most commonly offered type of paid long-term leave (28% offer)
  - 18% do not have a formal policy but offer paid long-term leave on a case-by-case basis
  - 16% offer paid maternity leave
  - 12% offer paid long-term leave for a serious illness or injury
  - 9% offer paid paternity leave

Figure 15. Long-term Leave Currently Offered



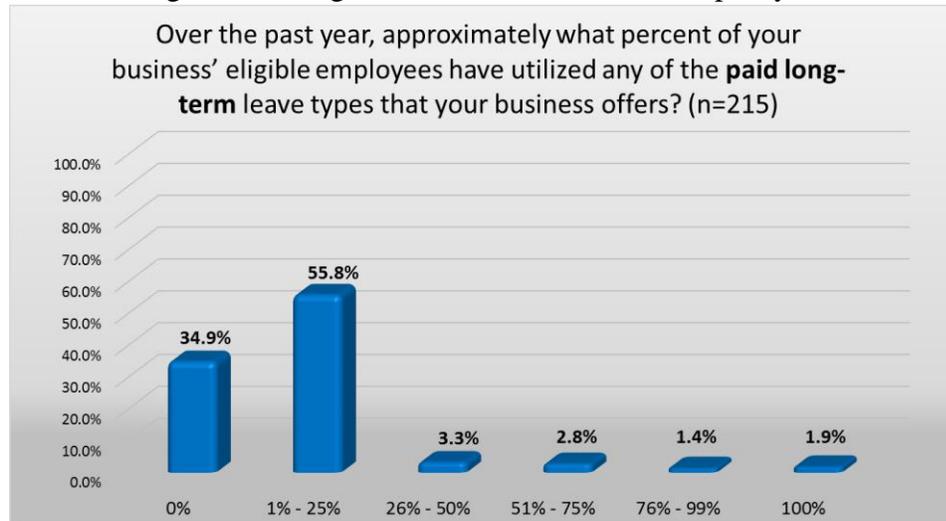
- The length of long-term leave that can be taken was 6 weeks or less for 82% of the businesses who offered long-term paid leave (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Length of paid long-term leave available



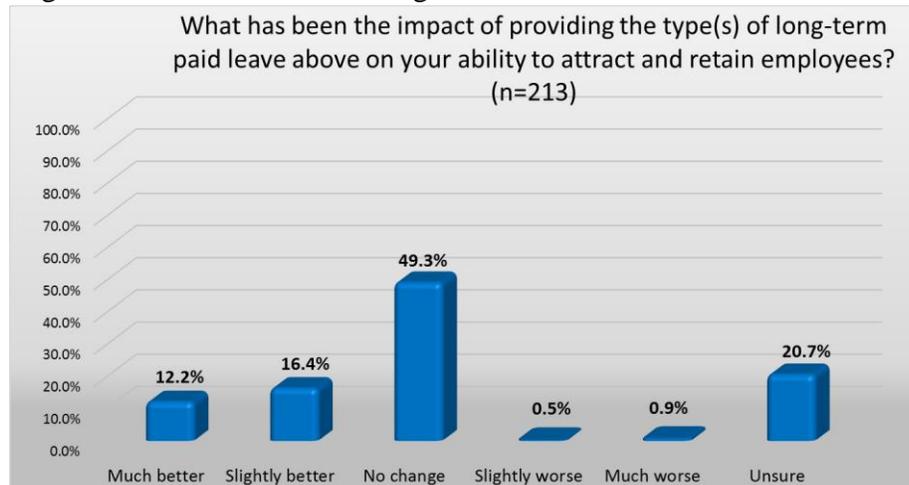
- For over 90% of the businesses who offer paid long-term, fewer than a quarter of eligible employees utilized these benefits in the past year (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Long-term benefits utilized in the past year



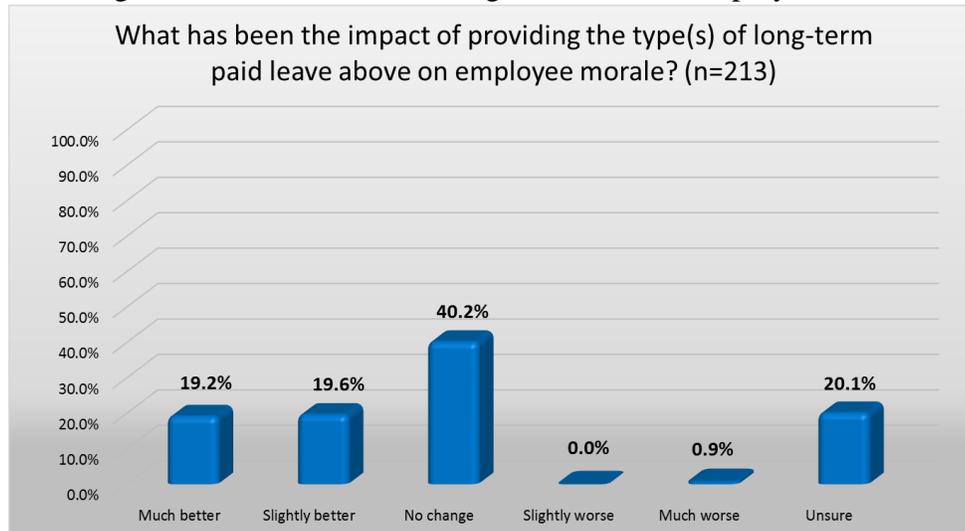
- 29% of businesses observed improved employee retention and attraction as a result of offering paid long-term leave, and about half observed no change in or employee retention and attraction (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Effect of current long-term leave on attraction and retention



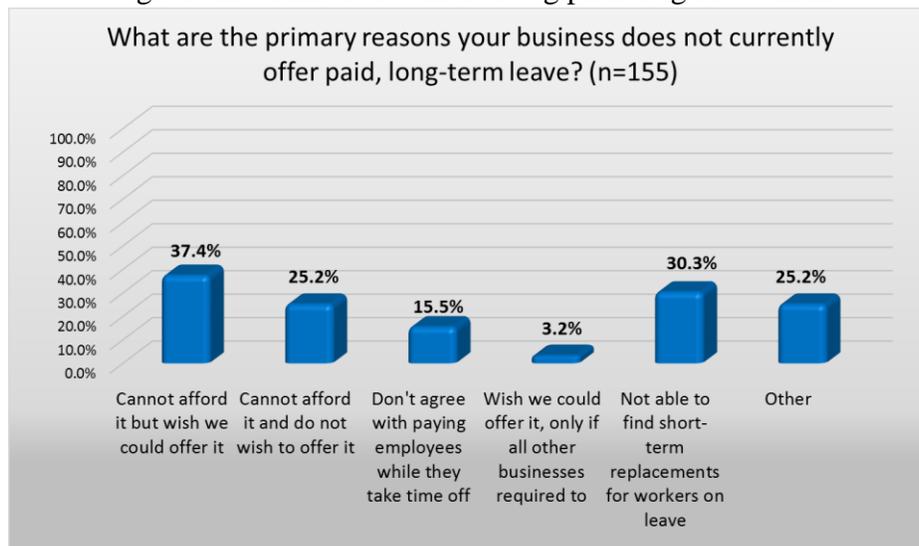
- 39% of businesses observed improved employee morale as a result of offering paid long-term leave, and 40% observed no change in employee morale (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Effect of current long-term leave on employee moral



- Of the businesses that did not offer any form of paid, long-term leave, the primary reasons they did not included that they could not afford it but wished they could (37%), were not able to find replacement workers (30%), and could not afford it and did not wish to offer it (25%) (Figure 20). A variety of ‘other’ responses were written in, including: concern about abuse of the program, and only having part-time employees.

Figure 20. Reasons for not offering paid long-term leave



One of the most commonly expressed concerns in the open-ended comments section was the cost to small businesses, and some suggested an exemption for small businesses. Some expressed the concern that the cost of the various benefits will be an unreasonable burden to Vermont business owners. Some commented in support of such a policy in general, others commented on the need for a policy and support for each childcare, and many comments focused on the difficulty of offering benefits for small business owners.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Vermont business leaders who responded to the survey were split in their level of support for a Paid Family and Medical Leave policy in Vermont. As a next step, we recommend an active outreach and education campaign to inform business owners, employees, and the general public about the background and justification for a PFML policy, and the specific details of such a policy for Vermont. For the business community, based on survey comments, framing should focus on the cost of such a policy, as well as an explanation of how small businesses will be supported.