

How much it would cost workers—or their bosses—remains to be seen, and is certain to be the most controversial aspect of the proposal.

“The devil is in the details. How do you fund it? Is there going to be an increase in the payroll tax? That would be a big concern for our members,” said Shawn Lewis, spokesman for the National Federation of Independent Businesses, a lobbying group that represents small companies.

The current family leave plan is paid for entirely by workers, through the payroll tax. Labor unions want to see employers pay into the plan as well, said Steve Smith, spokesman for the California Labor Federation. They also want to increase the amount workers receive during leave, arguing that the partial pay under current law forces many low-wage workers to forgo the leave—even though their taxes pay into the fund.

“If you are a low-wage worker working two jobs to get by, having your paycheck reduced significantly so you can stay home with your baby just doesn’t work for you,” Smith said. “So those who take advantage of it are on the upper end of the scale.”

Democrats in the Legislature have begun introducing bills to give workers full pay during family leave and expand the amount of time off, though the legislation doesn’t yet carry many specifics. Newsom is forming a task force that will examine ways to structure and pay for the expanded leave.

“There are a lot of smart people talking about this and figuring out the best way to do it,” said Sen. Connie Leyva, a Chino Democrat who chairs the women’s caucus. “I absolutely think it can get done.”

Assembly Republican leader Marie Waldron said Republicans like the idea of giving children more time with their parents, but are concerned about the costs. She called a larger payroll tax “a direct hit to the already strained middle class.”

Newsom has expressed interest in a larger overhaul of California’s tax system, including potential changes to property taxes and sales taxes. He said a plan to pay for family leave may become part of a broader tax reform proposal.

—LAUREL ROSENHALL



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