



## ***Changing Faces Women's Leadership Seminar***

Women as Innovators and Entrepreneurs

**July 7 – 20, 2019**

Oahu ♦ Maui

### **Draft Action Plan**

---

**Christina SABLAN**

*Representative, 21<sup>st</sup> Northern Marianas Legislature, Saipan, USA*

#### **“The Northern Mariana Islands Family First Act”**

##### **Issue/Problem Statement**

There is currently no commonwealth-wide policy or program providing paid family leave for employees who are new parents or who must care for sick family members. Individual businesses may at their discretion provide paid family leave for employees; most do not. The commonwealth government allows just 13 days of pregnancy disability leave for women, and 2 days of paid parental leave for new mothers and fathers. The federal Family Medical Leave Act applies in the Northern Marianas, but as in the rest of the country only to firms with more than 50 employees (which excludes most firms in the islands). The FMLA also only guarantees unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks. The lack of paid family leave disproportionately affects women, who are often the primary caregivers for new children or sick family members. Studies have shown that paid family leave removes an important barrier to women's participation in the workforce, increases the likelihood that women will return to work, and improves overall productivity and morale. Paid family leave is also associated with significant positive outcomes for children and their early development, and gives new parents the ability to take time off together to nurture and bond with their new child, and to attend to their own health needs.

*A program of paid family leave would strengthen working families in the Northern Marianas, and working women in particular, giving them greater support to care for new children or ailing family members and remain in the workforce.*

##### **Mission & Project Description**

To establish a commonwealth-wide policy of paid family leave in the Northern Mariana Islands, to support working families who are caring for new children or ailing relatives.

Enact legislation to establish a commonwealth-wide program of paid family leave, and create a funding mechanism by which these benefits would be paid out.

##### **Personal Role**

My role will be to champion the enactment of a paid family leave policy in my capacity as a member of the Northern Marianas legislature. I have been researching the subject and looking at models in different

**The Changing Faces Women's Leadership Seminar is funded by the East-West Center**

states and various countries. I have also begun reaching out to members on both sides of the aisle in the legislature. Last March I delivered a presentation and led a working group discussion on the subject at a Women's Summit on Saipan. The next steps we identified involved bringing stakeholders together from the public and private sector for a dialogue about what a paid family leave policy would look like, and how we would pay for it.