

ZEROWEEKS

35 WEEKS

12 WEEKS 12 WEEKS

12 WEEKS

18 WEEKS

14 WEEKS

12 WEEKS

13 WEEKS

17 WEEKS

52 WEEKS

12

PRESS KIT

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ZERO WEEKS: QUICK FACTS

Logline: America's paid leave crisis and the cost of doing nothing.

Runtime: 86 minutes

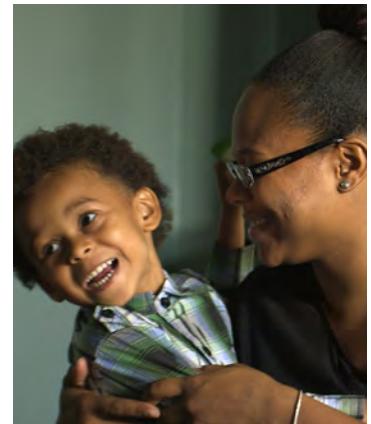
Production Company: Yellowing Productions, Chicago

Festival Highlights:

- WORLD PREMIERE: Camden International Film Festival, September 2017
- NEW YORK PREMIERE: DocNYC, November 2017
- WEST COAST PREMIERE: Portland Film Festival, November 2017

Awards:

- BEST DOCUMENTARY from International Women's Film Festival
- BEST EDITING from Colorado International Film Festival
- Focus Award for "Achievement in Directing" from Women in Film
- Culture Champion Award from Family Values @ Work in partnership with Labor Project for Working Families



Film Boilerplate: Most Americans agree that family comes first, but we are the only developed country without paid leave. In one of the richest nations in the world, having a baby, a medical emergency or an aging parent can be a trigger into poverty. Weaving powerful personal stories with insightful interviews, *ZERO WEEKS*, explores America's paid leave crisis and the cost of doing nothing. *ZERO WEEKS* is the fourth film by award-winning director, Ky Dickens, a female director with a track record of using her work to shift public opinion. To learn more or to view the film's trailer, visit ZeroWeeks.com.

Quotes from Director Ky Dickens:

"All of my films are birthed from necessity. Following the birth of my daughter, I was faced with the experience of inadequate maternity leave, which left me in emotional and financial distress. That experience became a gateway for awareness that millions of men and women face the same situation every year. The paid leave crisis does not only affect new parents, but anyone who has struggled with a personal injury or illness, or cared for a sick spouse or aging parent."

"My purpose as a filmmaker lies within the ability to tell stories that haven't been told before. I'm interested in digging beneath headlines and common perspectives, into stories that have been buried by time, injustice, ignorance or lack of interest. If history is commonly written by those with privilege, power, access and prominence, I want to tell the stories of those who have been forgotten, lost or left out. *ZERO WEEKS* is one of these. It illuminates how our country's lack of paid family leave hurts businesses and families alike."

Quote from Ellen Bravo, co-director of Family Values @ Work and the "Agent of Change" featured in ZERO WEEKS:
"The momentum behind the paid leave movement is undeniable. Activists all across the country have been fighting for policies at the state and national level; in just over a year, we've doubled the number of states (from 3 to 6) which passed paid leave. Whether you are nursing a newborn, getting chemo, or taking care of an aging parent while trying to earn a living, the lack of paid leave in this country impacts almost all of us. This film will be a powerful tool to create awareness and engagement."

Interviews with Ky Dickens or Ellen Bravo are available upon request. Please email press@zeroweeks.com

Images from the film, promotional graphics and other resources are available at zeroweeks.com/press-downloads/

PAID LEAVE: QUICK FACTS

Only 14% of U.S. workers have access to paid leave (Pew Research Center)

76% of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck (Bankrate Financial Security Index)

About 60% of the American workforce is eligible for the current Family and Medical Leave Act guaranteeing unpaid leave. Of those that qualify, only 48% can't take unpaid leave because they can't afford to go without a paycheck. (Department of Labor)

With access to paid family leave:

- women are more likely to stay in the workforce and off public assistance
- families are less likely to declare bankruptcy
- children have better long-term health
- infants whose parents spend time at home during their first year have long-lasting effects on their eventual academic performance

(Center for Economic and Policy Research, Center for American Progress)

1 in 4 women return to work within 2 weeks of having a baby.

(In These Times magazine)



There is a looming elder care crisis: Every 8 seconds, a "baby boomer" turns 65. By 2025, 1 in 5 Americans will be over 65. (U.S. Census Bureau)

Of the 39 industrialized countries, the United States ranks dead last in Maternal Health, Child Health and Family-friendly policies (Center for Disease Control, World Economic Forum)

Three states have implemented paid leave policies: California, Rhode Island and New Jersey. New York state, Washington D.C. and Washington state have passed legislation and are preparing for implementation.

Since California instituted paid leave in 2004, 91% of employers said it either boosted profits or had no effect. They also reported higher productivity, higher morale and lower turnover. (Center for Economic and Policy Research, Center for American Research)

More than 20 states will explore paid leave legislation in the coming year. (Family Values @ Work)

Many countries with paid leave have stronger female labor force participation than the United States. In fact, if women between the ages of 25 and 54 participated in the U.S. labor force at the same rate as they do in Canada or Germany, the U.S. GDP would increase by roughly 3.5 %, which translates into more than \$500 billion of additional economic activity. (U.S. Dept of Labor)



Countries guaranteeing leave to care for personal or family health had the highest levels of economic competitiveness (Human Rights Watch)

Women comprise about 47 percent of the workforce in the United States and two-thirds of the low-wage workforce. (New Republic)

For every dollar that a white man earns, moms earn 73 cents; single moms earn 56 cents; and moms of color earn even less than that. (National Women's Law Center.)

FILM SYNOPSIS

ZERO WEEKS is the first feature documentary to explore America's desperate need for modern paid family leave policies. With the help of a variety of experts, we follow the historical arc of family and medical leave and how our nation arrived where it is now: lagging behind every other country in the world except for Papua New Guinea. The feature film makes an economic, social, medical, marital and global case for paid family leave by creating a poignant, hopeful and honest snapshot of how the lack of affordable time for caregiving impacts American families and business. The film follows various American families from different socioeconomic backgrounds as they are forced to choose between the family they love and the job they need. ZERO WEEKS introduces viewers to small businesses who are leading on leave, as well as doctors, economists, corporate leaders and elected officials who are making the case for paid leave. It also takes the viewer inside paid leave campaigns.



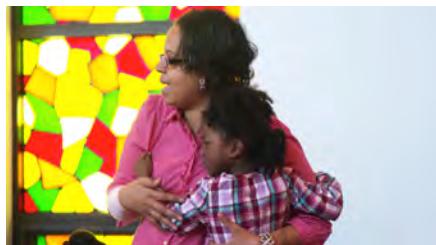
Abi, the film's youngest subject, exemplifies how the lack of paid medical leave can have drastic ripple effects throughout a family. Last year, Abi's father was diagnosed with leukemia. His employer fired him while he was in the hospital, just days after his diagnosis. The family lost their health insurance, their income and their home. When we meet Abi, she is considering dropping out of high school in order to work full time to support her family — a decision that wouldn't have been necessary had the family had paid medical leave.

Brian grew up in Alabama, a conservative southerner who believes in small government and self-made success. When Brian and his wife Krystina were pregnant with twins, they were ecstatic. Six months into her pregnancy, Krystina went into premature labor and tragically, the couple lost their twin girls. Brian was grief-stricken and worried for Krystina, who was suffering from separation anxiety, severe depression and traumatic shock. Brian's employer told him that he could take 3 days off to grieve for each baby. A short year after the loss of their girls, the couple became pregnant again. They had a beautiful, healthy baby girl in April 2016. Brian was told he could only take two days off.



When Jasmine was in her final month of pregnancy, she learned that paid maternity leave wasn't offered at the daycare center where she'd worked for years. She couldn't afford to go more than three weeks without a paycheck and her employer had promised a temp worker at least 8 weeks of employment. Jasmine spent her brief maternity leave looking for a new job. When she finally found one, it was two hours away. Juggling childcare along with a two-hour commute is not easy. Jasmine was unable to keep her job and currently relies on food stamps, Medicare and unemployment assistance to get by. She desperately wants to work and is looking for another job closer to her home. Like many families in this country, having a baby knocked her out of the workforce and uprooted her financially stable life.

Kesha is a single mother who bravely faces every day despite an ongoing battle with breast cancer. As the sole provider for her family, she can't take off work to take care of herself. Without paid leave, she schedules her chemotherapy treatments during her lunch break. In the evening, she manages caring for her daughter, cooking and cleaning and helping with homework, despite her extreme fatigue and her own self-care needs. Kesha's doctor ordered her to take 8 weeks off to allow her body a small amount of healing so she can beat the cancer, but she must keep working to pay the bills.

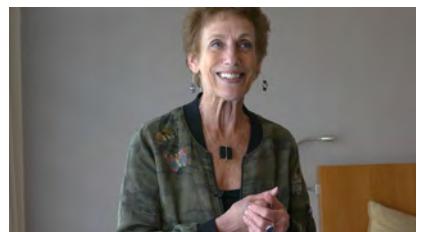


FILM SYNOPSIS, continued



Octogenarian Ruby lost her sight six years ago. Recently, she underwent a complete knee replacement surgery and now requires more acute care during the recovery period. Ruby's daughter, Donna, honors Ruby's request to live with dignity and independence in the comfort of her own home. Their story represents the reality of millions of working Americans who must provide care for their aging parents in the midst of an unprecedented elder boom. As the aging population grows and professional caregivers remain in short supply, more people will need to rely on family members as primary caregivers.

In 1981, Ellen Bravo started working at Wisconsin Bell where she was told: "You can't take a sick day for five years." Her time at the phone company was stressful, having to choose between her family and her paycheck. Earlier she had no paid leave with either of her two pregnancies. She left Wisconsin Bell in 1982 to dedicate her career to gaining a more equitable workplace for all. Thirty-five years later, Ellen helps lead a network of broad coalitions working for feasible and winnable legislation that keeps people attached to the workforce and engaged with their families. Ellen's story embodies one of the through-lines in the film: that change is possible and it is happening.



Through these various film subjects, ZERO WEEKS puts a compassionate, inspiring face on the millions of Americans who are suffering because of our nation's lack of paid leave. Film has a unique power to advance public opinion and move public policy and will be a powerful tool for our allied partners.

IMPACT CAMPAIGN

Our goal is to encourage businesses and lawmakers to create more family-friendly policies. We also want to build broad awareness about paid leave amongst the general public and working families. Despite quantitative research, Americans are still unclear on whether they have access to paid leave, how public policy might make a difference, and what role they could play in bringing it about.

We feel strongly that the film needs to be released as quickly as possible to work in concert with the 20+ states and hundreds of businesses organizing for paid leave in 2018 and beyond. We have engaged Working Films, a national leader in the use of documentary media for social impact, to execute the Zero Weeks Impact Campaign. Working Films is expanding our strategic partnerships and advising our distribution and impact strategy.

Once the film is released, Working Films will manage regional festival screenings, live screening events, a web-based media campaign, and grassroots viewing parties. Screenings across the nation will point audiences to meaningful ways to act and generate press around the issue. We have designed the impact campaign to be meaningful in any community across the country, however we are placing additional emphasis on screenings and discussions with business leaders, healthcare communities and in states where paid leave campaigns are near the tipping point, as well as places that are still developing, including conservative-leaning states. Additionally, we will engage unique interest groups impacted by the issue of paid leave in the places where they naturally convene: community centers, places of worship, business schools, chambers of commerce, union halls, etc.



Our current impact campaign partners include:

- AARP
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Caring Across Generations
- Center for American Progress
- Center for Paid Leave Leadership
- Fairygodboss
- Family Values @ Work
- Jobs With Justice
- Main Street Alliance
- Mi Familia Vota
- MomsRising
- National Partnership for Women & Families
- PL+US
- Women and Girls Foundation

FILMMAKERS



KY DICKENS, DIRECTOR | PRODUCER

Award winning filmmaker Ky Dickens is best known for her highly acclaimed documentary work, her emotionally compelling commercial reel and her endless list of questions.

Ky directed the highly-acclaimed documentary *SOLE SURVIVOR*, which profiles four survivors of otherwise fatal plane crashes. Sole Survivor was acquired by CNN Films for broadcast and theatrical release. It premiered on the network in January, 2014 and was named the "Best Feature Film" at the 2013 BMA Awards. It is currently available on Amazon Prime and iTunes.

Ky's 2009 feature documentary, *FISH OUT OF WATER*, won four juror prizes and secured international distribution by Netflix & First Run Features. The film has been hailed as a "tool for reconciliation between the church and LGBTQ community." It was translated into Spanish, Russian, Italian and French Creole and has screened at over 500 churches and universities. The film was inducted into the United States Library of Congress in 2011 for its instrumental role in changing the national perspective on LGBTQ human rights.

Ky's other soon-to-be-released film, *THE CITY THAT SOLD AMERICA* (2018), is about Chicago's crucial, yet often-overlooked place in American consumer culture. The film is a sequel to Emmy-award winning ART & COPY.

In addition to her feature film work, Ky directs commercials for some of the biggest brands in America. Her clients include Tylenol, Sears, Hallmark, McDonald's, Koehler, Purina, Huggies, Ronald McDonald House Charities and Wrangler. Ky is featured on the highly competitive "Free The Bid" list of the top recommended female directors in America. She is represented by STORY.TV (based in LA and Chicago). Ky graduated with Magna Cum Laude honors from Vanderbilt University. She lives in Chicago with her wife and daughter.

ALEXIS JAWORSKI, PRODUCER

Alexis has worked for more than 15 years in arts and entertainment with a focus on audience development, communication strategy and media production for some of the country's most vital artistic organizations, including Steppenwolf Theatre Company and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. She has also served as the Director of Marketing & Communications for The Joffrey Ballet and River North Dance Chicago.

Incorporating film production into her personal and professional interests since 2008, Alexis was Co-Producer on Ky Dickens' 2013 feature documentary *SOLE SURVIVOR*, and was Production Manager on the forthcoming *THE CITY THAT SOLD AMERICA*.

Alexis received a B.A. in Psychology and Art History from University of Vermont and her M.A. in Media Studies from DePaul University. She also works as a producer and production coordinator for commercial and non-profit media projects, for clients including McDonald's, Grubhub, Greenheart International, Rotary International and Lambda Legal.



Chicago's taxidermist of truth

Director Ky Dickens' documentaries delicately preserve real-life stories for future generations. She uses her emotional intelligence to sensitively tackle charged subjects in her award-winning and influential films, covering subjects as wide-ranging as survivor's guilt and the history of advertising in Chicago



You can't be a passive participant. You have to be actively trying to make the situation better." Ky Dickens is talking passionately about the paucity of women on film sets, be they directors, camera operators or grips. She pauses. "But on the plus side, there's a really short line for the bathroom." A flash of humour that perfectly illustrates the down-to-earth attitude that makes her such an accomplished documentarian.

Over the course of her 10-year career, Dickens has trained her lens on some deeply emotive subjects - religious opposition to gay marriage (*Fish Out of Water*); survivor's guilt (*Sole Survivor*); the lack of paid family leave that drives mothers back to work within two weeks of giving birth in the US (*Zero Weeks*) - with empathy and emotional intelligence. The result? Hard-hitting films that have not only garnered numerous awards on the indie festival circuit, but shifted policy and public opinion.

Telling tales out of school

The daughter of Swedish immigrants, Dickens grew up just outside Chicago. A natural storyteller ("It started as tall tales when I was little,") she has been documenting the world around her since picking up a video camera in fifth grade. When a college friend died tragically in a car crash, she was able to construct a memorial from the hours of footage she'd accumulated. "Suddenly it was clear that film can immortalise someone in a way. Something just clicked in my brain and I thought, I will always have a camera with me now, no matter what."

After graduating from Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, with a "cobbed-together" film degree, Dickens started making commercials to fund her first documentary, 2009 Netflix hit *Fish Out of Water*, which challenged the seven biblical verses commonly used to condemn homosexuality. Since

then, the commercial and filmmaking strands of Dickens' career have flourished in tandem: her deft interviewing skills translating particularly well into documentary-style branded content pieces for clients such as Huggies, Wrangler, McDonald's and Hallmark.

Chicago's hidden ad history

Since signing to STORY in Chicago last year, she's directed a Mother's Day campaign for Tylenol, *How We Family*, redefining traditional notions of parenthood via interviews with mothers including actress Lucy Liu, whose son was born via a surrogate. "I never want it to feel contrived," she says of her approach. "Even if it's a script, I'll ask the subjects questions, so they're not just delivering a line. In order to get those really raw performances, I spend a lot of time getting to know these people, researching them, what are their insecurities? The more you can make them feel safe and protected, [the better], so it feels like they're just having a conversation with a friend."

Dickens reckons that women have a natural advantage when it comes to unscripted work. "I'm not saying that men aren't capable of it, but [in] society, women are trained to be emotional listeners. So it's good that advertising agencies are starting to harness that."

This autumn, the two facets of her career cross over in *The City That Sold America*, the untold story of Chicago's pivotal role in the US advertising industry. While Madison Avenue is commonly seen as adland's ancient seat, Dickens points out many of the early creative greats hailed from Chicago, along with marketing ploys like product placement and market research.

In the feature-length documentary, Dickens spotlights key milestones such as the shift away from long copy in print ads ("You should buy X because Y...") to large images, pioneered

by Leo Burnett; and the introduction of brand mascot "critters" - Tony the Tiger, the Pillsbury Doughboy et al - which were mocked at the time.

She also, excitingly, uncovers local talents that have been whitewashed from the history books, such as the black designer and artist Charles Dawson, who was "making comic books and pop art long before Andy Warhol".

A sequel to the Emmy Award-winning film *Art & Copy*, *The City...* has been three long years in the making. In contrast to the "visceral" experience of making *Zero Weeks*, the film took "a ton of research", complicated by many of its subjects - such as the father of modern advertising, Albert Lasker, legendary copywriter Claude Hopkins, and Leo Burnett himself - being long dead. Currently at the final hurdle of rights clearance, it's set to premiere in early 2018 and has taught Dickens a few lessons about making commercials: "When a storyboard lands on my desk, I can't look at it in the same way now. I see the roots of where it came from."

It's set to be a busy few months with both *The City...* and *Zero Weeks* hitting the indie film festival circuit, and two more films in production: LGBTQ documentary *Queer in Trump's America*, and, for fun, a "teeny little project" on the Chicago Mothman, a legendary seven-foot humanoid bat said to terrorise the Windy City.

City of affordable dreams

Winged monsters aside, Dickens has a deep affection for Chicago, citing "the awesome community" of documentary makers, editors and filmmakers, the liberal, progressive vibe and the affordable cost of living. While many have upped sticks to NY and LA, in Chicago "it's easier to have a creative life", she concludes. "And that's where my values are: I'd prefer to be making my work than waiting tables on the side." ■



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Laura Berger
Senior Editor at Women and Hollywood
Nov 7, 2017

DOC NYC 2017 Women Directors: Meet Ky Dickens—"Zero Weeks"

Ky Dickens directed the acclaimed documentary "Sole Survivor," which profiles four survivors of otherwise fatal plane crashes.

"Sole Survivor" was acquired by CNN Films for broadcast and theatrical release. Her 2009 award-winning feature doc "Fish Out of Water" secured international distribution by Netflix and First Run Features and was inducted into the United States Library of Congress in 2011 for its instrumental role in changing the national perspective on LGBTQ human rights.

"Zero Weeks" will premiere at the 2017 DOC NYC film festival on November 11.



"Zero Weeks"

W&H: Describe the film for us in your own words.

KD: "Zero Weeks" is about America's paid family leave crisis and the cost of doing nothing. It's a raw wake-up call for all Americans who have become complacent with our system. We are the only industrialized country in the world without paid family leave. This matters to everyone who might become sick, have an aging parent, have a baby, or has a spouse or loved one who might get injured or sick — it matters to all of us.

We talk a lot about family values in America but what does that mean if in one of the richest nations in the world having a baby, a medical emergency, or an aging parent can be a trigger into poverty? This is the ultimate collision of responsibilities — the need to earn a living alongside the need to take care of your family.

Paid family leave is a crucial societal safety net. Research validates its power to diminish gender and racial inequity, make low-income workers more secure in the workforce, foster early childhood development, expedite recovery from major illness, improve the health and dignity of seniors, and bolster retention and profit margins for small businesses. Profit margins for small businesses.

We tell this story by weaving together the stories of six families, along with tongue-and-cheek animations and illustrations to break down why this crisis matters, and how we can easily solve the problem by being great to business and families.

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W&H: What drew you to this story?

KD: When I was on the festival circuit with my last film, “Sole Survivor,” I was pregnant. I told my wife that I would take a break from making another feature documentary and focus on our family for a few years.

At the time, I was also on staff at a production company. I had been there for 11 years and I was the first woman to become pregnant. I received two weeks of paid maternity leave from the company. That became a catalyst that broke my loyalty and productivity for them. It was terrible.

As I entered the world of parents, I learned quickly that I was one of the lucky ones. One in four women go back to work within 10 days of having a baby. Only 14 percent of Americans have any paid leave at all. Millions go to work while battling cancer or while their spouse or child is in the hospital.

In short, my paid leave experience opened my eyes to the crisis. I ended up starting work on the film a few months after my daughter was born. I broke my promise to my wife—to not work on another film for a few years—but it was necessary. I felt like this story had to be exposed so some of the suffering, gender inequality, and income inequality could finally be addressed.

W&H: What do you want people to think about when they are leaving the theater?

KD: I want people to be outraged. Paid leave is easy. It's low-hanging fruit. It's something we can do that will impact every American's life.

Millions of dollars of research have been poured into studying paid leave—on both the left and the right side of the aisle. Paid leave is proven to reduce the amount of women on food stamps. It's proven to improve gender and racial inequality. It's proven to increase happiness and overall health. Paid leave decreases depression and anxiety. Paid leave keeps aging seniors out of retirement homes longer and fights off many chronic diseases that come with aging.

Paid leave is the number one thing we can do as a society to dramatically improve the health and income equality for millions. It's great for businesses. In the states where paid leave has passed, 90 percent of businesses say the bill either had a positive impact or no impact on their business at all. It's a no-brainer.

I want people to leave the theater, feel outraged, and then channel that outrage by calling their elected officials and chamber of commerce. I want them to make a difference.

W&H: What was the biggest challenge in making the film?

KD: The biggest challenge was being a new mom and fighting my own guilt and sadness about being away shooting the movie.

I remember being on the road for a week at a time when my daughter was so small. I'd be filming new moms, weeks after they gave birth, who were going back to work. They'd talk about how unnatural and horrible that felt for them, and I would feel a visceral sadness that I wasn't at home with my own baby.

There were mornings I lay in a hotel bed crying because I wanted to be home with my daughter but couldn't stop making the film. My favorite poet Rilke says, "Let art spring from necessity." This film encapsulates that idea for me. It was almost like I needed to harness my own outrage when it was so raw because it was the oil that kept the engine running.

W&H: How did you get your film funded? Share some insights into how you got the film made.

KD: The primary funders were The Ford Foundation, The Bertha Foundation, The Chicago Digital Media Production Fund, and Frame Store, who donated a lot of post work.

But I really owe the film to The Ford Foundation. They have been a leader in helping to create inclusive economies for years. They've understood that paid leave is critical in giving all Americans a fair shake and that the absence of paid leave disproportionately impacts people of color and women. The Ford Foundation understood why this film needed to be made before I did and they trusted and empowered me every step of the way.

W&H: What does it mean for you to have your film play at DOC NYC?

KD: I love DOC NYC. It's become the New York festival where I want to host my New York premiere. I think the programming is smart and bold and the staff is extremely communicative with filmmakers. I think Basil Tsikos, DOC NYC's Director of Programming, is brilliant, and I trust the team.

W&H: What's the best and worst advice you've received?

KD: I honestly don't remember bad advice. I think I filter it out and let it go. But I remember the good advice. There are little pieces of it that I've collected along the way.

One piece of advice is that there's no magic door. There is no programmer, producer, or manager who will make your career. You are the magic door. Only you can make things happen. If you have a good product, it will find its way to the top.

This goes in tandem with other great advice: the harder you work, the luckier you get. Anyone being recognized for their work — of any kind — is not being acknowledged due to luck. It's hard work, sleepless nights, terrifying risks, selfless choices, and probably a lot of debt that got them to where they stand.

W&H: There have been significant conversations over the last couple of years about increasing the amount of opportunities for women directors yet the numbers have not increased. Are you optimistic about the possibilities for change?

KD: I'm optimistic about change but I think it will be slow. What it takes to break the system is radical inclusion. White men need to decide that it's cool to have women as their equals and right now, I think men feel most comfortable with other men on set and spitballing ideas. They might not be purposefully trying to discriminate — they might just want to work with their friends and not realizing that in doing so, they are perpetuating a gigantic wall of exclusion.

More women are out there making projects, showing that their talent and vision is brilliant and on par with the best creatives in Hollywood, but it is a boys' club and it will take a lot of the boys in the club to not just acknowledge and want change, but to actually radically create the change themselves.



This Heart-Wrenching New Doc Nails What The U.S. Gets Wrong About Paid Family Leave

Photo credit: © Halfpoint / Adobe Stock

TAGS: Maternity leave, Paid leave, Parental leave, Paternity leave, Workplace, Family



Raise your hand if you'd say you consider your family a priority. Now, raise your hand if it feels like your employer makes it easy for your family to be a priority.

If you only raised your hand the first time, you're in the majority. While most American parents agree that spending time with their kids — particularly when they're young — is

important, most American parents also struggle with maternity leave and paternity leave policies that often don't offer much paid time off.

In fact, in 2016, just 14 percent of private sector workers in the U.S. said they were getting paid family leave through their job, and less than 40 percent said they were offered personal medical leave through an employer-provided temporary disability program.

For new mothers, this reality can be particularly grim. Nearly one quarter of moms go back to work within just two weeks of having a baby because they simply can't afford not to. This is, in part, why the website Fairygodboss was built — to help job seekers get the inside scoop on companies' parental leave policies and general workplace culture.

"Zero Weeks," a new documentary by award-winning director Ky Dickens, takes a deeper look at paid leave and lays out the case for having guaranteed paid leave for every American worker.

U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, who, with Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) has sponsored the FAMILY Act, explains why having a more generous paid leave policy makes good business sense: "The U.S. economy loses billions of dollars every year because we do not have paid family leave. Small businesses and entrepreneurs, the engine of our nation's economy and drivers of innovation, cannot compete with the workplace benefits of larger companies," she explains in a statement.

"Freelancers and microbusinesses simply do not have the infrastructure to support workers who have caregiving responsibilities." Originally introduced in 2013, the FAMILY Act would provide a self-sustaining family insurance program for all workers, regardless of their age, marital status, sex, or size of their employer.

In addition to exploring paid leave from a financial and global perspective, "Zero Weeks" weaves together stories and interviews from activists, policy makers, researchers and personal narratives to highlight why paid leave is important from an emotional and medical perspective.

The film marks the fourth documentary from Dickens, who was inspired to create a film about paid leave after facing financial depletion, emotional turmoil and guilt of having "not enough time" due to a lack of paid leave after the birth of her first child.

"All of my films were birthed from necessity," says Dickens. "Following the birth of my daughter, I was faced with the experience of inadequate maternity leave, which left me in emotional and financial distress. That experience became a gateway for awareness that millions of men and women face the same situation every year. The paid leave crisis does not only affect new parents, but anyone who has struggled with a personal injury or life-threatening illness, or cared for a sick spouse or aging parent."

Chicago Tribune

'Zero Weeks' film explores abysmal U.S. family leave laws



Heidi Stevens, Reporter
December 21, 2015

Chicagoan Ky Dickens is directing and producing a documentary, "Zero Weeks," that zeroes in on the abysmal family leave policy in the U.S. Dickens has launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds. (Brian Sorg)

After 11 years at a film production company, Chicagoan Ky Dickens had earned a skimpy two weeks of paid maternity leave to spend recovering from the birth of her daughter, Harlow.

Now Harlow is 1 1/2, Dickens runs her own production company — Yellow Wing Productions — and she's directing and producing a documentary about our nation's abysmal family leave policies.

"[Zero Weeks](#)," Dickens' fourth documentary, follows young families who are struggling to care for family members — new infants, sick spouses, aging parents — with little to no paid time off. It also tracks the efforts of Ellen Bravo, executive director of [Family Values @ Work](#), a network of state coalitions that campaigns for more comprehensive family leave legislation.

"Paid leave is an issue that affects every single person," Dickens told me. "If you are ever going to get sick or injured, if you ever need knee surgery, if you have parents who are going to age, this is an issue that impacts you. So many people think this is just a new parents issue or a working mom issue, and it's not."

Which makes it all the more galling that the United States is on par with [Papua New Guinea](#) and [Oman](#) when it comes to paid leave.

"We are so far behind the rest of the world it's embarrassing," Dickens said. "It's unbelievable that this is a country where people grow up thinking it's a luxury, not realizing it's a necessity that other parts of the world have."

Particularly for new parents.

You've heard [the statistics](#) before, but they're worth repeating: The United Kingdom offers 40 weeks of paid maternity leave. Ireland and Vietnam offer 26 weeks. Singapore and Bangladesh offer 16 weeks, and China, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo offer 14 weeks. Seventy countries offer paid paternity leave. (Stats courtesy of the International Labour Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.)

In the United States, the [Family and Medical Leave Act](#) allows full-time employees to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave, but it's unpaid — leaving it to individual employers to determine whether they'll offer their workers any paid time off when they become new parents or need to care for a family member.

"There isn't a clear, sensible answer to why this has become a partisan issue in this country," Dickens said. "Around much of the world, family leave is considered a conservative issue that keeps families healthy and whole; it's almost a no-brainer everywhere else that gets complete bipartisan support."

"We're talking to agents of change, grass-roots leaders, CEOs of big companies, small business owners, medical professionals," she continued. "And everyone we talk to says economically, politically, from a business standpoint, from the sheer right-thing-to-do standpoint, it's just good policy."

Companies that can attract the top talent — and then keep that talent throughout life's challenges, expected and unexpected — are better positioned to compete in a global economy. And they save the money it would cost to recruit and train new employees when the old ones have been run off by lousy leave policies.

And yet, here we sit. With Oman and Papua New Guinea.

Dickens thinks one reason our lack of paid family leave stands is that many Americans don't think about it until they need it.

"I really don't think it's on people's radar," she said. "I know I was totally stunned when I found out I got two weeks. I called my mom and said, 'Doesn't everyone get three months?' As a teacher, she laughed. She said most teachers don't get any paid leave. That's why they time it to have their babies before summer break."

Dickens and her team hope to release the film in 2016 to raise awareness of the issue during a presidential election year. They've been filming for a year, and they hope to raise enough money through a [Kickstarter campaign](#) to continue filming without a pause in production, since they're following families and activists in real time. They need \$75,000 by Tuesday, and they're at just over \$25,000 as of Monday morning.

Here's hoping for a fruitful 24 hours.

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January 5, 2015



"The number one thing that all survivors need is privacy.

They need to be able to go back to a normal life."

–Ky Dickens

A screenshot of the CNN website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for News, Video, TV, Opinions, More..., U.S., World, Politics, Tech, Health, Entertainment, Living, Travel, Money (which is highlighted in blue), and Sports. A search bar is also present. The main content area shows two video feeds side-by-side. On the left, Anderson Cooper is visible from the chest up, wearing a dark suit and tie, looking towards the camera. On the right, Ky Dickens is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark top, also looking towards the camera. The background of both feeds appears to be a city skyline at night. In the bottom left corner of the screen, the text "SOLE SURVIVORS" is displayed in large, bold, white capital letters. In the bottom right corner, there's a smaller CNN logo with the text "6:19 PM PT" and "AC360°". A caption below the video feeds reads: "Anderson speaks with 'Sole Survivor' director Ky Dickens about her interviews with the people who survived what seemed like the impossible." The overall layout is typical of a news network's website during a live broadcast.

On January 5, 2015, Ky Dickens was interviewed by Anderson Cooper to discuss the reality of a survivors' experience and how privacy, non-exploitation and sensitivity are critical, in light of any tragedy.

Watch the interview [HERE](#).

What Happens When You Deny a Filmmaker Paid Leave? She Makes a Doc About It

By [Patty Wetli](#) | December 22, 2015



Filmmaker Ky Dickens (r.) meets with U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, one of the sponsors of a proposed paid family and medical leave act. [Facebook/Ky Dickens]

NORTH PARK — The United States is [one of only three countries](#) in the world — and the only industrialized nation — that doesn't mandate paid maternity leave for its citizens.

It's a policy, or lack thereof, that filmmaker Ky Dickens didn't need to research before tackling the subject in her latest documentary, "Zero Weeks," because she lived it.

Pregnant with her first child in 2013, Dickens, who lives in North Park, approached her employer about taking time off after her daughter's birth. She was told she could have two weeks, a far cry from the 12 she was hoping for, given that she'd spent 11 years at the company. "I couldn't believe it," Dickens said. "I got angry."

For most people, that's where the story would end. But Dickens has a habit of using her personal life as inspiration for her documentaries. Her 2009 film "[Fish Out of Water](#)," which examines the relationship between homosexuality and the Bible, was sparked by her experience of coming out during her senior year of college at Vanderbilt. "[Sole Survivor](#)," which aired in 2013 on CNN, has as its roots the death of a friend, who was killed in an auto accident after Dickens gave up her place in the car.

With "Zero Weeks," Dickens, 37, quickly realized her own story was just the tip of the iceberg. "I met a woman who had to go back to work right after a C-section. I met a bus driver who had to bring her newborn on the bus with her," Dickens said. "Every other country recognizes you're a worker, but you're also a human and a family member," she said. "Here we have this mentality, 'You just deal.'"

The more she investigated the subject, the more disturbed she became.

Though the federal [Family and Medical Leave Act](#) allows for 12 weeks of unpaid leave, the law only applies to full-time workers who've been employed for at least 12 months, at a company with 50 or more employees. "Only two in 10 Americans even have unpaid options," Dickens said. "It's all based on the luck of where you work — there's no rhyme or reason to it."

The issue of paid leave is an emotional and political hot potato in the U.S., but with "Zero Weeks," Dickens said her objective was to drive home the economics of the issue.

"Even *Forbes* and the *Wall Street Journal* agree it's good financial policy," she said.

States including Rhode Island and California have passed paid leave legislation, with 91 percent of businesses reporting no effect on their bottom line. At the same time, research indicates that providing paid leave increases employee retention and loyalty, Dickens said. "I found firsthand [that] my loyalty evaporated" when she was denied leave, Dickens said, and she ultimately left her job and found work elsewhere.

That email can be answered tomorrow

Coincidentally, two small-business owners in Chicago are making the case for paid sick leave based on that very economic argument. Sonat Birnecker, co-founder/owner of Koval Distillery, and Christine Cikowski, co-owner of Honey Butter Fried Chicken, [recently met with](#) the U.S. deputy secretary of Labor to push for fairer policies.

"A lot of people think [paid leave] will cut into their bottom line; they don't realize it's cutting into society. This is a real societal problem," Birnecker said.

"It's bad for morale, it's bad for health, it's bad for the work environment," she said. "Showing your employees compassion makes them more loyal."

Koval started out with two employees — Birnecker and her husband — and has since grown to 20 workers.

"Our policy is very simple: If you're sick, don't come to work," she said. "We're not machines, we get sick. You know what, the business will be there tomorrow, the email can be answered tomorrow." Days don't need to be accrued at Koval, and pay isn't docked.

Employees are "spending their lives helping you grow your business, and you want to respect that, you don't want your business detrimentally affecting their personal lives," Birnecker said. "The last thing you need is being in the hospital and worrying about losing your job," she said. "I don't want to be responsible for someone feeling like they can't take their child to the doctor. Something about that is not OK."

In the food and beverage industry, the added potential for sick employees to pass that illness onto customers is a very real concern — and one more reason paid leave makes good business sense, Birnecker said. "Most restaurants have people working who could be sick — who wants that?" she asked.

Birnecker and Cikowski are championing the cause within their respective industries, leading by example.

"I'm reaching out to the alcohol and beverage community in Chicago. I think we can all agree we value our employees enough," Birnecker said. "That's my first line of attack — to show we can do it, and we're doing well."

A ticking time bomb

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) introduced a [proposal for paid family and medical leave](#) in December 2013, and the legislation has been [stuck in committee](#) ever since. With "Zero Weeks," Dickens is on a mission to push the bill into the national conversation during the 2016 election cycle. She's turned to [Kickstarter](#) to help fund production costs so that she can have a final cut ready by summer 2016.

"The sooner this film is made, the sooner we can create change," the Kickstarter pitch reads. "There's too much at stake for too many families to let our country's outdated stance on paid leave drag on any longer."

While the lack of paid leave disproportionately affects the poorest Americans the most, Dickens said she's "trying to prove it affects everyone." "I don't want people to write off the issue," she said. "How many of us have six months of savings?"

She's filmed interviews with policymakers and economists and has identified a handful of stories to follow, though she's still looking for people who are caring for an aging parent or a sick or injured spouse.

"I want to find what's happening now, not what happened," Dickens said. "I want to do the countdown, from the time they get sick or have the baby to how long it takes until they hit the skids. What I've found is it takes two months."

Intruding on people who are under immense stress requires a deft touch on the part of the filmmaker, Dickens said.

"I mic them up and use really long lenses. I want them to forget about me," she said. "Sometimes we'll go outside and shoot through the window, and then they totally forget you're there."

At the end of filming, Dickens typically has thousands of hours of footage to edit and weave into a narrative.

"The big question is how to tell the story the best way," she said. "Do I insert myself and lead people through it? Do I follow the business owner, do I follow the worker? I always want to tell the most professionally credible story as possible."

Still, "Zero Weeks" remains for Dickens an intensely personal passion project.

"This whole thing started because people told me I could take two weeks after 11 years," she said.

**Hillary Clinton**
gets her groove on
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TODAY.com contributor

updated 8/14/2012 8:55:10 AM ET



Twenty-five years ago this week, Cecelia Cichan was the only survivor in a plane crash in Michigan that killed the other 154 people on board.

Only 4 years old when Northwest Airlines Flight 255 exploded in a ball of fire in 1987, Cichan said in her first interview since the horrific ordeal that she still thinks about it every day. Now 29 and married, Cichan tells her story in the yet-to-be-released documentary "Sole Survivor," excerpts of which aired on TODAY Tuesday. The documentary also features other people who survived commercial plane crashes despite long odds.

In the film, Cichan displays a tattoo of a commercial jet on the underside of her left wrist.

"I think about the accident every day," she told the filmmakers. "It's kind of hard not to think about it. When I look in the mirror, I have visual scars."

Story: Sole survivor of plane crash making 'miracle' recovery

A twitching arm

Cichan suffered a fractured skull, a broken leg and collarbone and third-degree burns covering much of her body in the crash. She somehow survived after the McDonnell Douglas MD 80 bound for Phoenix exploded into a ball of fire shortly after takeoff at 8:46 p.m. from the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport in Romulus, Mich., on Aug. 16, 1987. Her mother, Paula, her father, Michael, and her 6-year-old brother, David, were among the fatalities, as the family was returning from a vacation.

She was found among the wreckage when a paramedic spotted her twitching arm and heard her moaning as she suffered from serious burns on 30 percent of her body. For the first 24 hours, she remained unidentified before her grandfather confirmed it was her by her chipped front tooth and the purple nail polish her grandmother had painted on her fingernails before the trip.

The National Transportation Safety Board later determined the crash was most likely caused when the slats and flaps on the plane were not extended because of the crew's failure to use a pre-flight checklist; there was also a lack of electrical power at the time of takeoff that failed to trigger the warning system. In the aftermath of the crash, the second-deadliest in U.S. history at the time, Cichan was shielded from public view and raised by an aunt and uncle in Birmingham, Ala., after moving from her home of Tempe, Ariz.

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The subject of media scrutiny and public curiosity since her amazing survival, Cichan received numerous gifts from strangers in the aftermath and was featured on magazine covers and even a billboard in Phoenix wishing her well, according to The Arizona Republic. She granted her first interview to the documentary because of the theme of the film.

TODAY
Aug. 14
When Northwest flight 255 went down just after taking off from Detroit in August 1987, Cecelia Cichan, 4, was the only survivor. She now speaks out in a new documentary for the first time about the accident that killed her family and left her severely injured. NBC's Janet Shamlian reports.

02:47 / 03:31 Full screen Print-out Drop & share

"This 'Sole Survivor' project is more about a group, and that's why I'm willing to get involved and be part of something bigger," she told the filmmakers.

Moving moment

The director of the documentary, Ky Dickens, told NBC News that all the survivors were somewhat reluctant to speak out of respect to the loss that other families endured, but were aware of why the public is so fascinated with their lives. Cichan has kept in touch with families of the victims over the years, as well as with Lt. John Thiede, the firefighter who rescued her from the smoldering wreck. He met her for the first time as an adult on her wedding day, when she became Cecelia Crocker.

"To see her come down the aisle, my heart, I lost it really," Thiede says in the documentary. "Just to see her in person was something."

"I can say that Cecelia is happy, she's grounded, (and) she's doing wonderful," Dickens told NBC News. "She's in a committed relationship."

After speaking out for the first time, Cichan hopes to resume her private life, according to the documentary filmmakers. On Thursday, there will be a memorial in Romulus, Mich., on the anniversary of the crash, which remains one of the worst disasters in U.S. aviation history.

There is currently a memorial edifice in Romulus listing the names of all of those who perished on that day.

Learn more about the upcoming documentary "Sole Survivor" on the film's website.