

Working Moms Represent: Fighting For Family Friendly Policies in Congress

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Abstract:

Do working moms in Congress more effectively represent the interests of working moms in the electorate? Are women who are raising young children while serving as representatives more likely to represent the interests of working mothers and children than those members who do not have young children? This study examines the role of working moms in Congress by looking at the introduction of bills that affect women and children from 1973 through 2013. We define working moms as women who have children under 18 years of age in the home at some point in time while they are in office. We compare these women with those who have adult children or no children. Our findings show that women who have children under 18 while in office are more likely to introduce legislation across a broad range of categories that are specific to the needs of parents and children. We also find that legislation specifically dealing with children's health and welfare is more likely to be introduced by members who have had children than those with no children.

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Women have been serving in Congress since 1917 when Jeannette Rankin of Montana, a suffragist, was elected to the House of Representatives. Throughout the 1900's women made gradual increases in being elected to the House, ending the century with 59 female representatives. The current House membership is the highest in history with 84 women, totaling 19.3% of representatives (Center for American Women in Politics 2015). While the number of women has increased, some have argued that the legislative agenda of congressional women has not changed much since Rankin's time (Foerstel and Foerstel 1999). Female members of Congress (MCs) introduce legislation often considered to address "women's issues" - issues such as equality in the workplace including sexual harassment and the wage gap, women's healthcare issues including reproductive rights and insurance coverages, and social issues such as domestic violence. Were it not for women in Congress, many of these issues may never be part of the public discourse or legislative agenda.

There are other issues that often fall under the heading of 'women's issues' that are not inherently on the radar of *all* women. Policies regarding topics such as school lunch programs, maternity leave, day care costs, and children's health insurance are far from the minds of many women, however women with minor children deal with these issues on a regular basis. Given that legislators with minor children are more likely to have recent experience with these issues, they may also be more likely to introduce bills addressing policy problems that directly impact families and working moms. While most of the women who have served in Congress are mothers, the majority of them had grown children by the time they were elected.

Previous research has demonstrated that having women in office matters for policy preferences and outcomes (Dovi 2002; Swers 2001, 2002; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995), regardless of political party (Celis and Childs 2012; Osborn, 2012; Schreiber 2002). Some may argue that having working mothers in Congress is just another form of descriptive representation, or that

they simply represent a subset of women's interests, but we argue that like other groups with descriptive representatives such as Blacks and Hispanics, having working mothers in Congress has resulted in substantive outcomes for parents with young children and especially for working mothers. Research has shown that personal experience in varying occupations, religion, and race influences policy preferences and legislative activity in areas such as committee selection and bill sponsorship (Gooch 2006; Mansbridge, 1999; Pitkin, 1967), and we expect that parenthood will do the same.

In this paper, we will examine if parenthood affects representatives' legislative activity. We will begin by exploring how parenthood has been discussed in the current literature. We will then look at qualitative and normative accounts of how being a parent has influenced legislative policy preferences and behavior. Then, using a unique data set that includes bills introduced between 1973-2013 that pertain to primarily to children and parenting issues and information about all women in Congress, the ages and number of children they have, and political variables such as seniority, total bill sponsorship (Volden and Wiseman 2014) and their DW nominate score (Poole and Rosenthal 2001), we will test whether or not women with children are producing substantive representation for parents and children. In the final section, we will discuss the implications of our findings and discuss how we plan to continue this research.

The Role of Motherhood in the Literature

The majority of the research on women as legislators has focused primarily on two areas, the first being how women affect political outcomes based on gender identity, focusing on specific areas, often referred to as women's issues such as education, healthcare, and welfare (Barnello and Bratton 2007; Swers 2002; Reingold 2000; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Dolan and Ford 1995; Vega and Firestone 1995; Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Thomas 1994; Saint-Germain 1989). The second area of study has generally focused on political ambition, political campaigns, and how

women have historically been disadvantaged (Fox and Lawless 2004, 2010; Palmer and Simon 2006; Fox 2000; Fulton, et al 2006; Elder 2004; Fowler and McClure 1989; Gertzog 1984) in running for political office. Both of these areas of study create a great foundation that help scholars understand how and why having women in office is important. Both of these areas also touch on how having children affects women in politics. The political ambition literature focuses on how having children affects a woman's decision to run for office (Fulton et al 2006; Elder 2004), how parties view women with children as potential candidates for recruitment (Fox and Lawless 2004, 2010), how much of a woman's campaign focuses on her role as a mother (Schreiber 2012; Dwyer et al 2009), and how opponents use their family obligations against women in the campaign process (Dolan 2010; Fox and Lawless 2010 (2);). The research on the role of women in elected office often gives women credit for being more concerned with education policy, women's equality, and issues primarily concerning women health, such as reproductive rights (Barnello and Bratton 2007; Swers 2002; Reingold 2000; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Dolan and Ford 1995; Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Thomas 1994; Saint-Germain 1989). While the literature in both of these areas has expanded greatly over the past twenty years, there is very little qualitative or quantitative research examining how elected officials raising young children may act differently than those with adult children or those who have no children in their political activities, including which policies they pursue.

The political ambition literature focuses more on women and family than the literature concerning political outcomes. The primary way that children and family are brought in to the political ambition literature is by examining how the family influences a woman's decision to run for office. There is a high cost associated with running for office, including time away from family and work and a loss of privacy. Both men and women report that these costs keep them from throwing their hat into the ring, but studies find women are more concerned with the balance between family and career than men and may have a tougher time accepting that they can balance both (Fulton et al

2006; Burrell 1994; Fox and Lawless 2004; Fowler and McClure 1989). Being concerned about balance may be more prevalent among women because men tend to rely on their wives to take care of the balance while women tend not to have, or expect, the same from their spouses. After the birth of her son, Representative McMorris Rogers (R-WA), who is a member of the House leadership, and her husband decided that he would move to Washington, D.C. and stay home with their children during the day (Sylvester and Swain 2012) so that she could dedicate the time she needed to her job and reduce time away from their kids, but this is rare. Studies show that even in households where there are two working professionals, women are seven times more likely to be responsible for household chores, and the numbers are similar for childcare issues (Jewell and Whicker 1993; Conway 2001; Fox and Lawless 2004).

Women are, by-and-large, still the support system for the household and many interviews with female representatives demonstrate that is no different for women in the House (Foerstel and Foerstel 1999; Wasserman-Schultz and Dell' Antonio 2013; Keith 2014). Women are more likely to have a wider variety of demands on their time and this acts to suppress their political ambition. Women are also less likely to be recruited than men, especially women with children. Evidence shows that women are as likely as men to be elected, but women with children are sometimes perceived as weak candidates because they can be easily attacked for “abandoning” their children (Conway 2001). Another common attack on women with children is that they will become part of the “Tuesday/Thursday” club in Washington, spending the weekends in their home districts with their families and therefore spending less time serving their constituents (Palmer and Simon 2006). Although this literature does not address policy outcomes specifically, it demonstrates that there is an underlying assumption that women with children provide less representation or are less dedicated professionals than their fellow members of Congress. We argue that women with children are dedicated to producing policy outcomes, especially when it comes to children and families.

Referencing Motherhood

While there is no empirical evidence that being a mother affects how legislators view issues or incorporate certain issues into their agendas, the anecdotal evidence is abundant. Once elected, representatives with children often make appeals to voters, playing up their role as a mother. A clear example of this was seen when Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (D-FL) appeared on Larry King Live on May 5, 2008 to show support for Hillary Clinton and encourage voters in Indiana and North Carolina primaries to vote for her. In her appeal she played up her role as a mom, stating,

You know what my read, Larry, is, is that I'm a minivan mom. *That's all I know.* And that the last time -- a few days ago, I filled up my minivan, the one that I use to drive my kids around my district. It cost me \$67. And what Hillary's plan will do is it will put \$70, potentially, back into the pockets of people who, from week to week, if the federal government is going to give them a tank of gas and make sure that they can put food on the table that week and make sure that they can stay in their house and not get foreclosed on, I think every American would take that \$70”

Wasserman -Schultz emphasized that what she *knows* about gas prices and policies regarding them are based on her experiences as a “minivan mom”. This is a direct appeal to mothers, trying to bond with them, but more than that it is how she publically frames her view of the gas tax cut being proposed by Clinton. This would suggest that the fact that she has to drive a family minivan to accommodate her large family, she has three children, as opposed to a smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicle, affects her experience at the pump. Her role as a mother shapes her experiences and thus her support for the tax cut.

Another example of a parental appeal occurred recently when Paul Ryan was criticized after announcing he would not give up his family time, even if he were elected Speaker. Representative Diana DeGette (D-CO) came to his defense, saying that Republicans should support families and paid family leave. She stated, “As a mother of two young daughters when I first came to Congress, I

know firsthand how difficult it is to raise children while working full-time. But it's even more difficult for families who have to choose between caring for a sick child or welcoming a newborn into this world and being able to make ends meet." (DeGette 2015).

Interviews with member moms also offer evidence that their role as a mom shapes their legislative agenda and behavior in Congress. In an interview with *National Journal* (2007), Debbie Wasserman-Schultz stated, "It's important to have moms in Congress. Our perspective is different than that of dads with kids, or of women without kids . . . Our perspectives are different when we focus on issues like health care or education." This appears to be true across party lines. Representative Heather Wilson (R-NM) a mother of two, voted against President Bush and her Republican party in support of expanding the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). When the President vetoed the bill, co-sponsored by member mom Diana DeGette, D-CO, Wilson voted to override the veto. Accepting an award from the American Academy of Pediatrics for Outstanding Public Policy for Mothers and Children for her work on the SCHIP, Wilson stated, "I will continue to work hard to ensure children have access to health care and are given the opportunity to lead healthy lives from an early age," (Press Release 2008).

In 2013, Representative Jamie Herrera Beutler (R-WA) gave birth to a daughter who was born without either of her kidneys. The baby required special medical attention. After going public with this information, Rep. Herrera Beutler has reported that the experience of having to seek out medical care across state lines for her own child, and hearing from parents going through the same ordeal, has shaped her legislative agenda (Schwartz 2015). In 2014, she proposed a piece of legislation that would make it easier for children on Medicaid to receive treatment across stateliness if they had a complex medical condition. In an interview with *Marie Claire*, she stated, "I probably would have supported it before...but I wouldn't be the one who's selling it," (Schwartz 2015). Similarly, Rep. McMorris Rodgers is the mother of a small child with Down's Syndrome. This lead

her to form the bi-partisan Congressional Down Syndrome Caucus and co-sponsored a bill called the *Achieving a Better Life Experience Act* (Sylvester and Swain 2012).

Across issues and parties, women have stated that their role as mothers makes a difference. “Having kids is very relevant for a member of Congress. . . I totally understand the need for childcare. It was not a frill as many men thought,” said Representative Pat Schroeder, “It was the same thing with the Family and Medical Leave Act . . . When I spoke with women’s groups, I found that a lot of them identified with me,” (Cohen 2007). As Representative Schroeder suggests, the need for job security while out on maternity or emergency leave and issues like child care seem frivolous to many men, but is it these issues that sometimes drive working moms in Congress to push for better legislation.

A Policy Example - Family Medical Leave Act

When Pat Schroeder first entered Congress, she didn’t want to be known exclusively for her feminist agenda, so she requested a seat on the Armed Services Committee. At the time it was and always had been an all-male committee. Pat Schroeder requested the seat because, “When men talk about defense, they always claim to be protecting women and children, but they never ask the women and children what they think,” (Committee on House Administration 2007). The same year the first African-American member to serve on the committee, Representative Ron Dellums, D-CA, was seated as well. When the committee convened at the beginning of the new session, the chairman, F. Edward Herbert, D-LA, announced that, “women and blacks were worth only half one regular member,” so Schroeder and Dellums would be sharing a chair during committee meetings (Palmer and Simon 2006). It was clear to Schroeder that she had become a member of a boys’ club that was not welcoming of her input and it was this hostile workplace coupled with very public discrimination against working mothers that drove Schroeder to conceive of the bill that would become known as her greatest achievement.

Schroeder was a mother of two small children, aged 2 and 6, when first elected to Congress (Office of History and Preservation, 2007). She was an advocate for working women's rights, such as affordable child care and access to affordable healthcare during pregnancy, and worked tirelessly to push what was considered a "feminist" agenda; but when a court in California made a ruling in 1984 which essentially made paid maternity leave illegal in the state, based on the grounds of discrimination because it was determined that men were ineligible for the benefit, the issue of maternity leave became an issue that drew national attention. Schroeder quickly drafted a family leave bill and began to travel around the country to build support (Lowy 2003). Schroeder and her colleagues began introducing the bill in the House in 1985. After many revisions and having been introduced every year, the bill, which guaranteed that women and men could not lose their job for having to take leave to attend to family medical emergencies, including but not limited to maternity and paternity leave, finally passed both the House and Senate in 1990. President George H.W. Bush vetoed the legislation the following month and Schroeder accused the President of, "coming out against motherhood," (Lowy 2003: 98). The President vetoed the legislation because the business community was vocal in their opposition to the bill and vocally against the government mandating how company policies should be managed.

In September 1992, the bill, modified to be more business friendly, once again passed both houses. A week later, Bush once again vetoed the legislation. The Senate got the two-thirds majority to override the veto, but in the House with Election Day less than two months away, many in the President's party shied away from overturning a veto (Lowy 2003). That November, Bill Clinton won the presidency and took office in January 1993. With newfound support for women in the White House and in Congress in the "year of the woman", Schroeder re-introduced the bill. It quickly passed both houses and was sent to the President's desk. Sixteen days after taking office, on February 5, 1993, Clinton signed the bill into law and the Family Medical Leave Act became

effective in August 1993 (Monroe, Garand and Teeters 1995). The passage of the bill took nine years and countless hours, but Schroeder known affectionately as “the mother of FMLA” got the legislation passed and has even compared it with childbirth, stating, “It took nine months for me to deliver each of my children and nine years to deliver FMLA,” (Committee on Education and Labor 2008).

Moms in Congress Today

While Pat Schroeder entered an unwelcoming environment with few women, there have been significant gains over the years in the presence of women overall, and the number of women with children. In 1973, Representative Yvonne Braithwaite Burke became the first member of Congress to give birth while in office - and the first to be granted maternity leave (Durocher, 1973). There have since been nine other women to give birth during their tenure (Keith 2014; Skiba 2014). Serving in the House while having children under the age of 18 is more common than it used to be, but it is still fairly rare (see Figure 1). In the 113th Congress (2013-2014), 16 percent (13) of women in the house had children under 18, 16 percent (13) had never had children, and 69 percent (57 women) with adult children. Even though there has been a sizeable increase in the number of women serving in the House in the twenty-four years since the year of the woman (1992), it is clear that women who have adult children have had significant gains, while those who have no children have seen only a slow, but steady, increase and those with children still have home have been fairly steady in numbers since the 103rd Congress.

(Figure 1 about here)

Hypotheses

Given the extensive literature suggesting that women in office represent the interests of women more effectively (Burrell 1994; Mansbridge 1999; Swers 2001, 2002), it seems worthy of examining whether or not the women who are raising children while taking on the responsibility of

working as a representative extend that role to the interests children and other working mothers. We examine whether or not mothers in Congress more effectively represent the interests of mothers (and their children) in the electorate. Our first hypothesis is that female members of Congress who have children will produce more legislation that reflects the needs of children and parents than those without children. This includes bills pertaining to family medical leave, health insurance and medical issues specifically related to children and family needs, school related issues, and child safety.¹

As families grow, mothers are more likely to encounter a wider variety of issues related to child wellness. Additionally financial and time demands create more stress on families, and mothers in particular. This leads us to our second hypothesis, which is that as the number of children increases, women will produce more legislation regarding children and families.

Lastly, we theorize that having children at home while serving in Congress matters to the legislative agenda. Member moms with young children have had to worry about childcare and working with health insurance companies across state lines for their own children while serving in office and can more easily relate to the issues other families are facing. While mothers of adult children may recall struggling with issues affecting children and families, they are more removed from those challenges. We hypothesize that women who have children under 18 while they serve in Congress will produce more child centered legislation than those members whose children are already adults. Formally stated, our hypotheses are:

- H1: Female legislators who have children will produce more legislation focusing on children and families than female legislators without children.
- H2: As the number of children a member has increases, the number of child and family centered bills they sponsor increases.
- H3: Members who have a child under 18 while in office will introduce more child and family centered bills than members who have adult children.

¹ See Appendix A for the complete list of bill subjects and sub-topics to see how they relate to children.

Data and Methods

To test our hypotheses, we utilize three separate data sets: Congressional bill data, data containing personal information about female members of Congress, including the number and ages of their children by term, and data containing institutional and member legislative behavior information which primarily serve as control variables. Our data includes 196 unique female members of congress who have served a combined 784 Congress year terms. The unit of analysis for the data is a child and family centered bill, sponsored by a female member of Congress for a particular term , and covers bills introduced between the 93rd and the 113th Congress (1972-2013). The dependent variable is the count of Children and Family (C&F) bills sponsored in a particular session. We gathered the bill data using Python program code (JSON) which scraped data from GovTrack covering only bills which fell within our parameters of children and families²³. Using a two-step process, we first selected data from five broad search terms based on categories pre-defined by the Library of Congress for Thomas.loc.gov Education, Families, Health, Labor and Employment, and Crime and Law Enforcement,. We then selected on narrow search terms specifically related to children and families, including: preschool education; elementary and secondary education; adoption and foster care; child care and development; child safety and welfare; crimes against children; domestic violence and child abuse; family relationships; family services; divorce, custody, and support; birth defects; child health, employee benefits and pensions; employee leave; youth employment and child labor to capture the full spectrum of policies that could directly impact children and families. Our final data includes any bill which falls within our narrowly defined

² The authors would like to thank Colin M. Henry at the University of New Mexico for his research and programming assistance.

³ Gov Track in turn gathers its data by scraping a number of official U.S. Government website each day, read more on: <https://www.govtrack.us/developers>

14 subject terms.⁴ We further restricted the data to bills sponsored by women, which resulted in a total of 3,979 Children and Family bills written by female members of Congress. We also present a subset of bills with the narrowest subject term that meets the requirement of our definition of C&F bills, these are bills whose primary subject term and/or bill title are indicate a direct relevance to children and families. We know that this subset of bills contains legislation that will have a direct impact on children and families, while bills in our complete dataset include bills that have both a direct and indirect impact on children and families. Limiting our analysis to the subset of bills allows us to test our hypotheses on the narrowest possible definition of the bill subject, while the larger data allow us to test the hypotheses more broadly.⁵ To create our dependent variable we created a count of the bills sponsored by an individual woman for each session, or Congress year, they were a member using the Thomas number (which is individual and session specific for each member of Congress). This count of bills ranges from zero to 33 bills.

Our key independent variables include the number of children a member of Congress has, ranging from zero to ten (with an average of 2.1) and the age of her youngest child. This data was collected by the authors using a multi-step process. First, we used the Official Congressional Directories provided by the Government Publishing Office, which includes short biographies of members of Congress and often lists the number and names of member's children.⁶ To obtain the ages of the children we made use of both the History, Art, & Archives of the House of Representatives as well as news articles found through Lexis Nexis and Google News. When news

⁴ Again, for the complete list of subject and sub-topic of children and families bills, see Appendix A.

⁵ The restricted subset of primary terms includes: ACTION, Abortion, Adoption, Adult education, Autism, Bilingual education, Birth control, Child abuse, Child development, Child labor, Child welfare, Children's rights, Custody of children, Day care, Desegregation in education, Families, Family policy, Human fertility, Maternal and infant welfare, Mentally handicapped children, Physically handicapped children, Playgrounds, Pregnancy, Religion in the public schools, Schools, Student transportation, Students, Support of dependents, and Youth

⁶ Occassionally, they included the ages of their children as well, but not often.

articles were used, we reverse engineered an approximate year of birth and age by subtracting the age of the child from the year the news article was printed.⁷ Finally, we created three categories of children; no children (0), child/children under the age of 18 (1), and adult child/children (2),⁸ generating a factor variable. Each of these variables are coded for the particular Congress, such that if a woman became a first-time mother while in Congress she would be coded with zero children (0) up until the Congress when she gave birth and then coded as having one child (1) for subsequent Congresses. Similarly, the age category of the youngest child is also coded by Congress, once the youngest child reaches age 18 the woman is no longer considered a working mom, but rather a mother of an adult child and she will go from being coded as a one (1 -young child/children) to a two (2 - adult child/children).⁹ Over our 3,979 bill observations, 12.3% (491) were introduced by members who had no children (0), 17.1% (681) were introduced by members had children under 18 at home (2), and 70.6% (2,807) were introduced by members who had adult children (3). Using the session as part of our unit of analysis allows us to track changes of a member's behavior to examine the particular effect of being a mother of a young child compared with having older children or no children.

We use a series of control variables related to members' institutional behavior in an attempt to isolate the effects of being a parents and minimize the possibility that policy agendas are related to political environment. These data were gathered from Volden and Wiseman's Legislative Effectiveness Data (2014) which includes data on the productivity of members of Congress along

⁷ For example, if a news article published in 2006 listed a child as being 5 years old, we recorded their year of birth as 2001 and computed their age at each session their mother served.

⁸ We also tested a variable which distinguished between younger children, under age 12, and teenagers; however we did not find any differences between these categories, see Appendix B for this model.

⁹ Clearly, a mother does not cease to be a mother once her youngest child reaches 18, and she is still a "working mom", but for the purposes of this research, we are considering working moms to be members of Congress who have children under 18 years of age.

with other institutional variables. We control for seniority, as we expect that members of Congress with more seniority should write more bills. With seniority comes more experience and resources which allows members of Congress to be both more effective, but also more efficient in their bill sponsorship, meaning that writing new bills becomes a less costly activity as years progress. Indeed, seniority should be one of the strongest predictors for amount of bill sponsorship if the subject of the bill is disregarded. Seniority is coded as the number of terms served and ranges from one to 16 terms. Similarly, we include controls for the number of bills per session a member has written regardless of subject. We also use Volden and Wiseman's bill type variables to distinguish between commemorative bills and substantive bills. This allows us to separate lower cost bills which require fewer resources and are often largely symbolic in nature (commemorative bills) from the higher cost bills which require more resources to develop and produce (substantive bills). We ultimately expect that higher the number of total bills a member write per session across all issue areas, the higher the number of Children and Family bills. Including variables about the number of bills written by type serve as controls for how prolific a member is overall. Most Congresswomen do not write a commemorative bill in a typical session, and if they do they will likely only write one or two, although a few members have written 15 or 20 in a single term in office. The mean number of substantive bills written in a term is 25, very few members in our data had a session when they did not write any legislation, and some members in our data sponsored over one hundred bills in a single Congressional session. Our final control variable is an interaction between seniority and the number of substantive bills written. As mentioned above, we expect that with more seniority a member should have access to more resources and know the system better, allowing them to be more productive in creating substantive bills, as such we expect that these variables work in tandem, and should provide a significant interactive effect.

We include ideology as a control, measured by a member's DW-NOMINATE score (Poole and Rosenthal 2013). This variable measures a member's ideology by capturing the distance from the ideological median chamber member; it is a relative measure of ideology based on the chamber median and a member's entire voting history (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). The variable theoretically ranges from -1 to 1 with scores closer to 1 indicating a conservative record. In our sample of women members the mean DW-NOMINATE score is -.28, with a minimum score of -0.76 and a maximum score of 0.97. (See Table 1 for summary statistics for all of the independent variables used in our models.)

(Table 1 about here)

Thinking about ideology, it is clear that not all children and family bills are liberal or conservative in nature. We expect that in some issues, such as access to health insurance or protection of children in abusive household, motherhood will trump ideology. Additionally, the full set of bills includes bills which promote government programs in support of children and families, but also bills that aim to cut these programs. For example, the data includes both bills which are pro-choice and pro-life in terms of the abortion debate, bills that seek to expand S-CHIP and bills that seek to restrict funding for the program. Examining a dependent variable which is not defined by ideology is important because as Osborn (2012) finds, women on both sides of the aisle place priority on women's issues but their policy position on the subject are [often] viewed through an ideological or partisan lens. Using ideology as a control allows us to mediate main effects considering that we are examining subjects which tend to be more liberal in nature, but also allows us to consider the effects of the moderate women who may not be sponsoring these bills because they are interested in maintaining a moderate status quo and thus would be unlikely to sponsor more bills on the subject.

Our dependent variable is the count of Children and Family bills, this variable does not follow a normal distribution. This is not only empirically obvious by viewing a histogram of the distribution (Figure 2), but is rather intuitive as well. As with any typical count distribution we can consider that a member is most likely to write a few bills in any given session (in our data 60% of members sponsor fewer than 10 C&F bills), however some members are more prolific and sponsor more bills (as many as 33 bills in a single term). Very few members don't sponsor any bills at all (even within our set of only C&F bills). In addition, we know that because this is a count of bills written, there is no theoretical negative; the distribution is forced to end at 0 on the left tail of the distribution, producing a poisson, or count, distribution. The poisson distribution presumes that the variance of the dependent variable is equal to its mean, or else it suffers from over-dispersion (Long & Freese, 2014). Our count of C&F bills indeed is over-dispersed and we use a negative binomial model to correct for this discrepancy. The negative binomial model uses maximum likelihood to produce its coefficients and they are thereby not directly interpretable, as such we also estimate predicted counts using Stata's margins command. We present three models, all of which predict the same dependent variable which is the count of Children and Family bills. The first model is the basic model including the three category variable of the age of the youngest child, the number of children, and all basic control variables; the second builds on this model adding the interaction term between seniority and the number of substantive bills, and the final model includes only the restricted sub sample of bills specifically dealing with children and family subjects, and includes a dummy variable for having children or not rather than the factor variable¹⁰.

¹⁰ We also ran two comparison models, the first one included a four category factor variable on the full sample of bills separating younger children age 12 and under from teenagers, ages 13-17. This model showed no significant differences between younger children and teenagers leading us to the current full model. The second comparison model predicts the restricted sample of bills using the factor variable of age of youngest child, this variable showed no significant difference based on age of child leading us to use the dummy variable instead. Ultimately these comparison models show that there is more work to be done to specify the dependent variable.

(Figure 2 about here)

Results

The results of the three count model analyses on the sponsorship of Children and Family bills are presented in Table 2. Model 1 includes the results from the analysis of all Children and Family bills and includes as its key independent variable the factor variable of the age of the youngest child¹¹. These results show that having a child predicts a higher number of sponsored C&F bills than not having any children, as both categories of having children -young children and adult children - are significantly different from the omitted category which is women who have no children. These results support Hypothesis 1 which suggested that we should see differences between women who are mothers and those who do not in the sponsorship of legislation pertaining to children and families. Much of the literature on women as legislators and women's issues suggests that female legislators sponsor these types of bills, in part, because of their particular experiences, including motherhood. This line of thinking follows an essentialist pattern in failing to recognize the varying experiences of women. Our results show that while women without children do write at least some bills relating to children and family policy, women who are mothers write significantly more bills in these areas.

(Table 2 about here)

The results of Model 1 also show that the number of children is a significant predictor of children and family centered bill sponsorship; simply stated, the more children a woman has the more bills she is likely to sponsor. This provides support for our second hypothesis, which states

¹¹ When included in the model the factor variable is dummied out, the "no children/none" category is left as the comparison category, as such having a young child and having an adult child are compared to having no children. Comparisons between those categories are seen in the predicted probabilities only.

that as the number of children a member has increases, the number of children and family centered bills they sponsor would also increase. In order to examine these substantive effects we regressed the number of children a member has in a given session on the counts of bills she introduced in that session. The results, as revealed in Table 3 show that the Hypothesis 2 is supported when the member has up to five children. Any number of children beyond five (and up to our empirical bound of 10 children) predict the same number of bills, considering the 95% confidence intervals.

(Table 3 about here)

The differences in effect between having one child to two children is relatively small as we consider within session counts of bill sponsorship, however, there are clear distinctions between the number of children, and a substantively larger effect when moving from a small, to medium, to a high number of children. These results are shown with 95% confidence intervals in Figure 3. For example, women without children are predicted to sponsor 7.3 C&F bills, mothers of three children, 8.8 bills, and finally mothers of large families of five or more children write 10 or more bills relating to children and families in a single session of Congress. The drop-off in significant differences beyond five children is unsurprising for both empirical and theoretical reasons. Empirically there are very few women who have more than five children and very little power to reveal differences there. Additionally, we expect that the effects of having a number of children will taper off once reaching five children because families have already encountered a wide variety of issues pertaining to children and families, and at ten or more bills per session they may have simply reached their legislative capacity in this issue area.

(Figure 3 about here)

As previously stated, Model 1 shows that both women with children of any age sponsor more C&F bills per session than women who are not mothers. Our data allows us to disentangle

this further to determine if working mothers with children under age 18 behave differently than women who are mothers of adult children. In Hypothesis 3 we presented an expectation that members who have a child under 18 while in office will introduce more child and family centered bills than members who have adult children, because of recency effects and closer personal connections to the issues. In order to answer this question we must look at the predicted counts, as model coefficients only tell us that both groups are significantly different from omitted group (women with no children). The predicted counts for the age categories of children in Table 4 and in Figure 4, reveal the substantive differences between women in Congress without children, working moms with children under age 18, and mothers of adult children. In the original model the results show that female legislators without children sponsor an average of 7.3 C&F bills during each congressional session, compared with working moms of children under age 18, who sponsor 9.6 bills each session, an increase of more than 2 bills per session on average over women with no children. Mothers of adult children sponsor 8.2 bills per session, thus falling squarely in between women without children and the working moms, as we would expect. These results suggest that there is a sort of recency effect in that when women are actively dealing with the needs of children and the potential strains of family life, particularly as working moms, they are more likely to relate to these issues, more likely to relate to other mothers, and they are likely to sponsor these types of bills.

(Table 4 about here)

While women who are mothers of adult children do write more C&F bills than childless women, once the children are grown and the woman becomes an “empty-nester”, the effect is reduced in comparison to the working moms. This is especially important when we consider the differences in the women who are running for office, and changes to women who are in office for long terms. Our data reveal something important about the literature’s somewhat essentialist

expectations of descriptive representation of women as champions of child and family policy. We suggest that these expectations may be tainted by assumptions that the experience of motherhood as an identity and influencing characteristic on legislative behavior does not change over time. Most women who run for Congress are either childless or are mothers of adult children because of the strains of public life and the intense, long work hours. While our data shows that these women do sponsor bills which deal with children and families, they do not do so to the same extent as mothers of young children. Our data reveals that the strongest supporters and most prolific sponsors of children and family bills are mothers, and specifically mothers who currently have young children while they serve in the House.

(Figure 4 about here)

For each one of our models the control variables are also significant and most are in the expected direction. Women with more seniority write more C&F bills than women who were elected more recently. Not surprisingly the total number of substantive bills a female member of Congress writes in a session predicts her subset of C&F bills, as this is a measure of how prolific she is in developing legislation. Somewhat surprising is that the number of commemorative bills sponsored in each session actually decreases the number of C&F bills written. This may suggest that women who write these bills are less engaged in writing substantive bills, or that developing more commemorative bills are actually a more costly activity than we initially expected. The interaction model found largely the same results. In this model the interaction between a member's seniority and the number of substantive bills written in the session was found to be significant. In other words being prolific and having seniority jointly affect the number of C&F bills sponsored. In this model the effect of seniority alone is washed out by the interaction term; however, the control for the number of substantive bills remains significant and positive. The predicted counts for the

interactive model are slightly more conservative than in the original model, ensuring that the effects of seniority and productiveness are taken in tandem, thus producing the mild decrease. That said, the substantive differences between the interaction model and the original model are negligible. These counts reveal when considering seniority and the number of substantive bills written, women without children write about 7.1 C&F bills in comparison to working moms who write 9.4 C&F bills in any one session of Congress. Again, mothers of adult children fall squarely between the two categories with just about 8 bills per session.

Model 3 analysis is limited to the subset of the specific Children and Family bills. Again this subset of bills includes only bills in categories directly related children and families. An initial iteration of this model using the age categories revealed that there were no significant differences between the age categories¹², this could be for a number of reasons, including the smaller number of bills in the sample or the nature of this bills, which in some cases may be more miscellaneous as they were not able to fit into some of the other major categories. In response this model uses the dichotomous variable of having or not having children, and the model shows that mothers in Congress sponsor more specific C&F bills than women who do not have children during that session. All other variables remain significant and in the same direction as in Model 1. The subset model which includes only bills specifically in C&F categories, and uses a dummy variable between women without children and mothers, shows mothers write 9.3 bills per session, and that other women write about 8 bills in the same time.

Conclusion

Being a member of Congress is time consuming, requiring long hours, travel back and forth to Washington, D.C., campaigning, fundraising, and opening your life up to the public. These

¹² This model is presented in Appendix C

conditions are not necessarily conducive to attracting women of minor children for the job, however a fair number of women over the years have chosen to work as Congresswomen while raising children. Party leadership on both sides of the aisle has included a working mother of young children: Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) is the current head of the Democratic National Committee and Cathy McMorris Rogers (R-WA), a woman who gave birth to all three children of her children while serving in the House, served as the House Minority Leader for the Republican party from 2002-2003. While having women serve in the House is certainly good for women overall, we ask if having working mothers in the house produces more legislation that is aimed at children and families. The majority of women in the House are mothers, but does having mothers of young children mean that mothers, children, and families in the electorate will get better representation? Our results suggest that the answer is yes.

Our study uses bill sponsorship data over a 40 year period to determine if working moms really represent. We collected information on bills by topic and limited analysis to those bills that fit categories directly related to children and families. We then examined bill sponsorship controlling for the number and ages of children of members. The results show that working mom consistently produce the most bills related to children and families. In all three of our models, women with children under 18 at home sponsored more legislation than women who had adult children and women with no children. When it comes to representing parental issues, such as children's health insurance, child safety, family leave, and reproductive policy, among others, working moms really are representing.

It is common to hear the expression that you do not quit being a mother after your children are grown in popular culture, our data suggests that, while one may still be a mother, they might not continue to be concerned about parental issues to the extent that they were when their children were small. This is an important point not to overlook. In the past, literature has treated women as a

whole as champions of child and family policy, we argue that this is not heterogeneous and that mothers in general, and mothers of minor children in particular, are the real workhorses of these policies.

These results are promising, but they are not without their limitations. For one, these analysis are limited to working mothers and we make no comparisons to working fathers. It is possible that Congressmen with young children behave in ways similar to Congresswomen with young children, and that they are also acting as champions of policy for children and families. Additionally, we did not account for the nature of the bill, only the topic of the content. Future research should account for whether the bill is takes a traditionally liberal or conservative approach to children and family issues. There is wide variation in bills regarding issues like family leave, and those variations need to be accounted for.

While there is still work to be done, these results show that having parents of young children in Congress matters. Parents are dealing with issues like children's health insurance, finding affordable quality childcare, changes in school curriculum, vaccinations, and child safety requirement and protections day in and day out. They are in touch with what other parents are going through and are in the best position to craft policies that address areas of concerns, and our findings suggest they are performing as they should, providing substantive representation for parents and children across the country.

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Figure 1. Female Representative Parental Status by Session of Congress

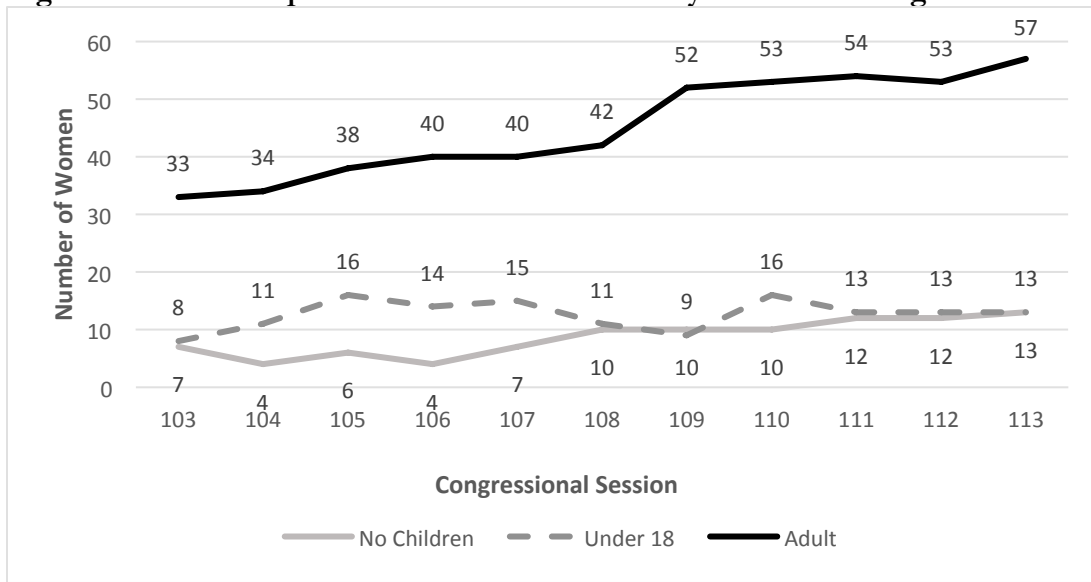


Figure 2. Histogram of Children and Family Bills by Session

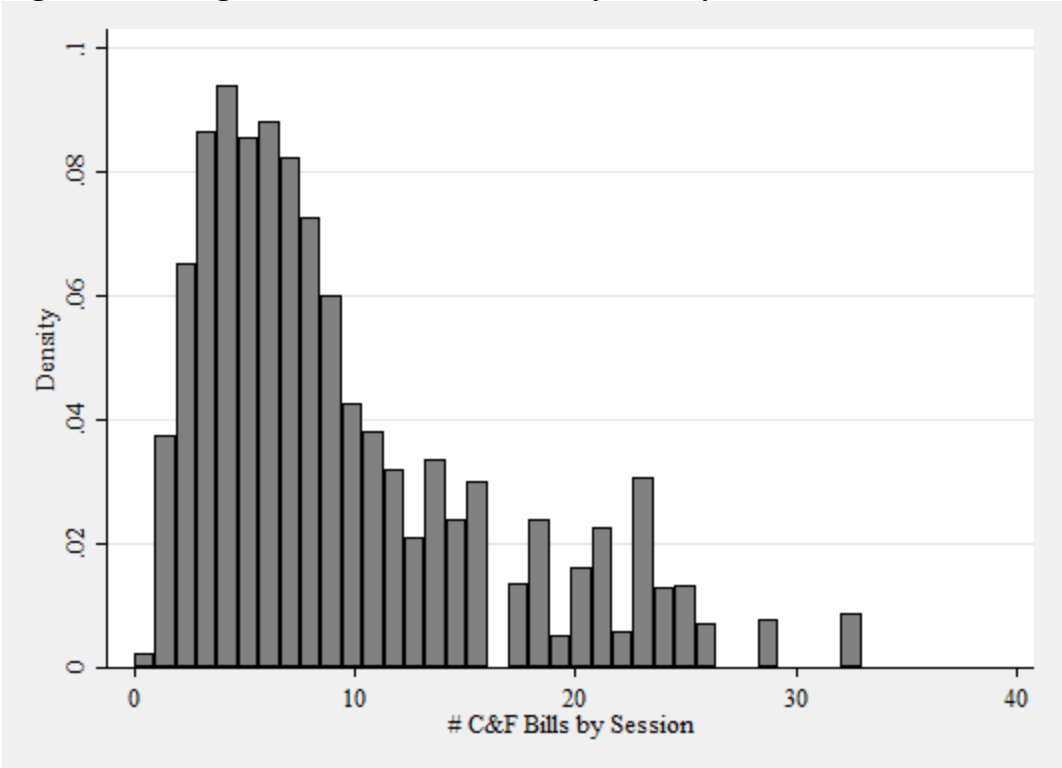


Figure 3: Predicted Counts for Model 1 by Number of Children

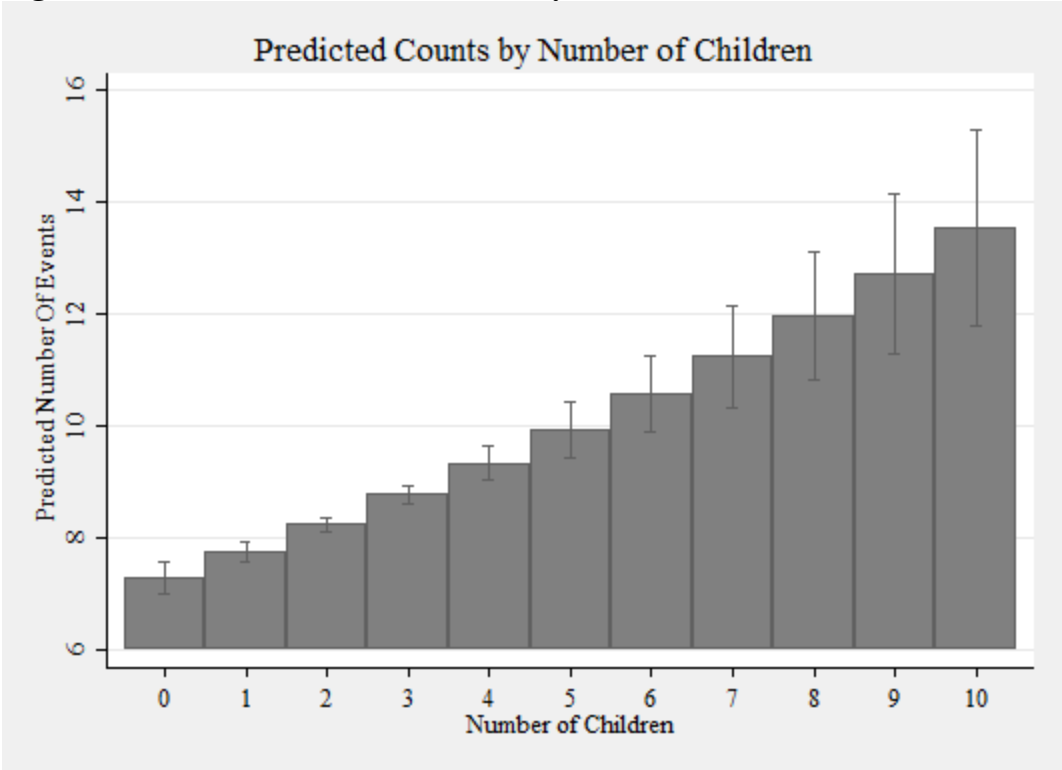


Figure 4. Predicted Counts for Models 1-3 by Age Category of Youngest Child

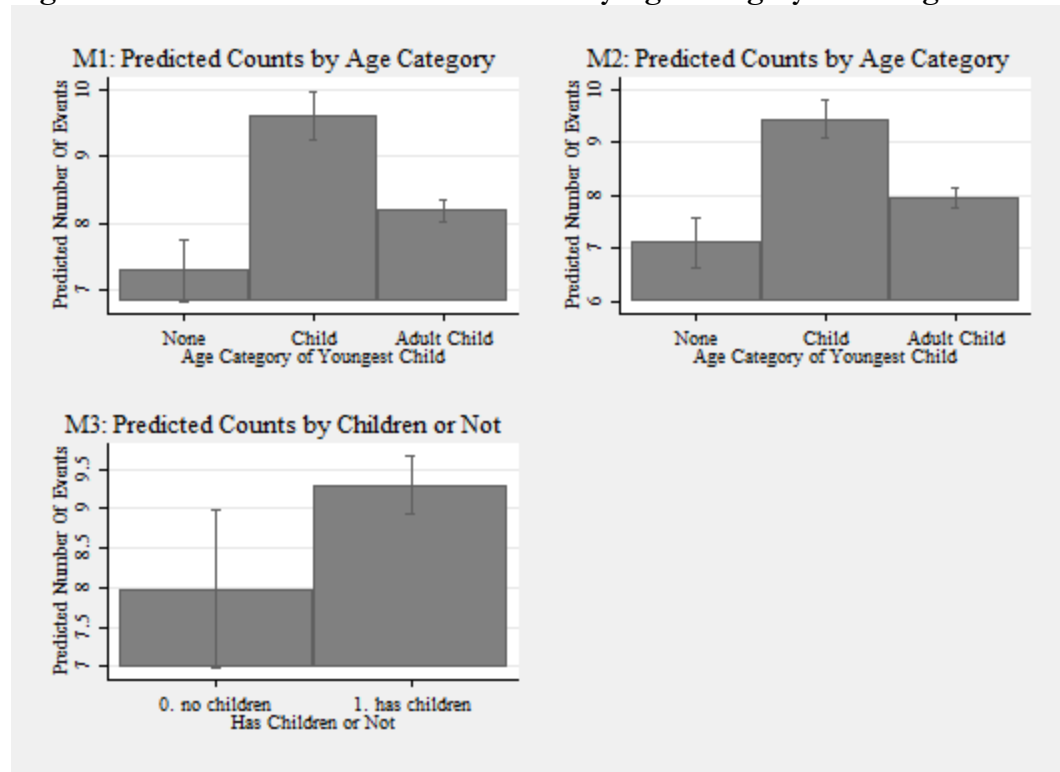


Table 1. Summary Statistics of Variables of Interest

| | N | Mean | Min | Max |
|---------------------|----------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Count of C&F bills | 3,979 | 9.4 | 0 | 33 |
| Seniority | 3,976 | 5.2 | 1 | 16 |
| DW-NOMINATE | 3,850 | -0.28 | -0.76 | 0.97 |
| Substantive Bills | 3,979 | 24.9 | 0 | 128 |
| Commemorative Bills | 3,979 | 1.1 | 0 | 33 |
| Number of Children | 3,979 | 2.1 | 0 | 10 |

| | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| No Children | 491 | 12.3% |
| Has Children | 3,488 | 87.7% |
| No Children | 491 | 12.3% |
| Minor Child (< Age 18) | 681 | 17.1% |
| Adult Child | 2,807 | 70.6% |

Table 2. Count of Child & Family Centered Bills Sponsored

| | All C&F Bills (Model 1) | Interaction Model (Model 2) | Specific C&F Bills (Model 3) |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i># C&F Bills by Session</i> | | | |
| Minor Child | 0.276 ^{***} (0.036) | 0.285 ^{***} (0.036) | |
| Adult Child | 0.116 ^{**} (0.038) | 0.113 ^{**} (0.039) | |
| Has Child(ren) | | | 0.152 [*] (0.072) |
| Seniority | 0.056 ^{***} (0.004) | 0.008 (0.007) | 0.035 ^{***} (0.008) |
| DW Nominate Score | -0.412 ^{***} (0.021) | -0.415 ^{***} (0.021) | -0.475 ^{***} (0.048) |
| Substantive Bills | 0.024 ^{***} (0.001) | 0.013 ^{***} (0.002) | 0.028 ^{***} (0.000) |
| Commemorative Bills | -0.012 ^{***} (0.002) | -0.010 ^{***} (0.002) | -0.031 ^{**} (0.011) |
| Number of Children | 0.062 ^{***} (0.008) | 0.063 ^{***} (0.008) | 0.059 ^{***} (0.018) |
| Interaction Seniority & # Substantive Bills | | 0.002 ^{***} (0.000) | |
| Constant | 0.884 ^{***} (0.028) | 1.113 ^{***} (0.0538) | 0.894 ^{***} (0.062) |
| Constant | -1.999 ^{***} (0.052) | -2.102 ^{***} (0.055) | -2.914 ^{***} (0.360) |
| Observations | 3847 | 3847 | 454 |

Table 3. Predicted Counts for Number of Children

| | All C&F Bills |
|--------------|----------------------|
| None | 7.295*** (0.141) |
| 1 | 7.761*** (0.094) |
| 2 | 8.257*** (0.062) |
| 3 | 8.784*** (0.090) |
| 4 | 9.345*** (0.159) |
| 5 | 9.942*** (0.246) |
| 6 | 10.580*** (0.347) |
| 7 | 11.250*** (0.461) |
| 8 | 11.970*** (0.588) |
| 9 | 12.730*** (0.730) |
| 10 | 13.550*** (0.889) |
| Observations | 3847 |

Standard errors in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Predicted Counts for Age Categories of Children

| | All C&F Bills (Model 1) | Interaction Model (Model 2) | Specific C&F Bills (Model 3) |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| None | 7.291 ^{***} (0.237) | 7.103 ^{***} (0.233) | 7.979 ^{***} (0.510) |
| Minor Child | 9.611 ^{***} (0.180) | 9.447 ^{***} (0.175) | 9.289 ^{***} (0.186) |
| Adult Child | 8.188 ^{***} (0.086) | 7.950 ^{***} (0.102) | |
| Observations | 3847 | 3847 | 454 |

Standard errors in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix A. Subjects and Sub-topics for Children and Family Bill Collection

To collect information on children and family bills, the data was first collected by the broad subject area and then further reduced by the sub-topic within that subject. For example, in the area of Crime and Law Enforcements, we only collected information on bills that fit under the sub-topic of crimes against children.

Gov Track Subjects:

- Crime and Law Enforcement
 - Crimes against children
- Education
 - Preschool education
 - Elementary and secondary education
- Families
 - Adoption and foster care
 - Child care and development
 - Child safety and welfare
 - Domestic violence and child abuse
 - Family relationships
 - Family services
 - Separation, divorce, custody, support
- Health
 - Birth defects
 - Child health
- Labor and Employment
 - Employee benefits and pensions
 - Employee leave
 - Youth employment and child labor

Appendix B. Comparison Models, Predicted Counts

| | All C&F Bills (Model 1) | All Age Categories | Subset with 3 Age Categories |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| None | 7.291 ^{***} (0.237) | 7.304 ^{***} (0.239) | 8.436 ^{***} (0.551) |
| Child | 9.611 ^{***} (0.180) | 9.749 ^{***} (0.238) | 11.11 ^{***} (0.486) |
| Teenager | | 9.486 ^{***} (0.250) | |
| Adult Child | 8.188 ^{***} (0.086) | 8.183 ^{***} (0.086) | 8.840 ^{***} (0.203) |
| Observations | 3847 | 3847 | 454 |

Standard errors in parentheses

⁺ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix C. Comparison Models

| | All C&F Bills (Model 1) | All C&F Bills Age Categories | Subset with 3 Age Categories |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| # C&F Bills by Session | | | |
| Child | 0.276 ^{***} (0.040) | | 0.275 ^{***} (0.076) |
| Adult Child | 0.116 ^{**} (0.038) | | 0.047 (0.075) |
| Seniority | 0.056 ^{***} (0.004) | 0.056 ^{***} (0.004) | 0.046 ^{***} (0.009) |
| DW Nominate Score | -0.412 ^{***} (0.021) | -0.412 ^{***} (0.021) | -0.510 ^{***} (0.052) |
| Substantive Bills | 0.024 ^{***} (0.001) | 0.024 ^{***} (0.001) | 0.027 ^{***} (0.002) |
| Commemorative Bills | -0.012 ^{***} (0.002) | -0.011 ^{***} (0.002) | -0.026 [*] (0.010) |
| Number of Children | 0.062 ^{***} (0.008) | 0.063 ^{***} (0.008) | 0.079 ^{***} (0.017) |
| Young Child | | 0.289 ^{***} (0.038) | |
| Teenager | | 0.261 ^{***} (0.041) | |
| Adult Child | | 0.114 ^{**} (0.038) | |
| Constant | 0.884 ^{***} (0.028) | 0.883 ^{***} (0.028) | 0.854 ^{***} (0.064) |
| Inalpha Constant | -1.999 ^{***} (0.052) | -1.999 ^{***} (0.052) | -3.047 ^{***} (0.392) |
| Observations | 3847 | 3847 | 454 |

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$