

PORT ST. LUCIE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1993



Robert York/The Tribune

Jerry Cammarata, who won the country's first paternity leave lawsuit, describes some of his experiences Tuesday as daughter Michelle listens.

Family-leave advocate backs new bill

Laura T. Ryan
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

JENSEN BEACH — Now that the Clinton administration has ushered in a new bill that guarantees family leave to employees in need, the New York educator who fought for paternity leave has another message: Use the law.

Since Jerry Cammarata took on the New York State Board of

Education in 1971 and won the right to take time off during his wife's pregnancy, a law has been on the books that requires companies to give women and men equal parental leave.

The trouble is, nobody uses the law because nobody knows it exists.

Cammarata fears the same ignorance will prevail with the new Family and Medical Leave Act. So

he talks about it. Often. Even on Tuesday, while he and his family continued their vacation in a Jensen Beach condominium on Hutchinson Island.

Cammarata, 46, sought paternity leave when his wife, Margaret, became pregnant with the couple's second child, Michelle. After their first child, Elizabeth, was born, Cammarata punched a clock at work while his wife

witnessed all the magical discoveries of infancy — the first words, the first walk, the first drink from a cup — at home.

"Those discoveries are very important," Cammarata said. "They are once-in-a-lifetime experiences."

Cammarata, a speech therapist, did not want to miss them the

Turn to **LEAVE/B3**

Leave: Cammarata favors workplace 'leave bank'

From B1

second time around. So he asked his employer, the New York State Board of Education, to grant him the four years of unpaid time afforded to women. The board declined. Cammarata threatened to sue. The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission stepped in.

"They said we didn't need litigation, just an affirmation of existing policies," Cammarata said.

In 1973, the EEOC ruled that Cammarata indeed was entitled to the unpaid leave then available to new mothers.

Earlier this month, nearly 20 years after Cammarata's victory, President Clinton enacted the family emergency leave bill. The bill,

twice approved by the Democratic Congress and twice vetoed by President Bush, takes effect in six months and guarantees workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year to tend to sick family members or newborn or adopted children.

Employees who annually work at least 1,250 hours, or about 25 hours a week, qualify for the time off.

"I've been in favor of the bill from the start," said Cammarata, who now works as a consultant with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, teaches classes at two New York City learning institutions, and continues to lobby for leave policies. "But where there is social responsibility there must also be economic responsibili-

ty. I would much rather have seen this bill passed where there was shared funding (between corporations and the government) for the bill.

Cammarata advocates a workplace "leave bank," into which employees and employers would make deposits. Those on unpaid leave could then draw from that fund.

He also wants adequate promotion of the bill so that it does not lie dormant like the silent EEOC policy.

"There has not been corporate responsibility in making employees aware that the EEOC policy has been replaced," he said.

To see his goals realized, Cam-

marata plans to send a packet of recommendations to Clinton in coming weeks. Included in the packet will be long-forgotten goals and programs developed in 1980 by the White House Conference on Families, to which Cammarata was appointed by President Carter.

"All the programs we had in the box were completely negated," Cammarata said. "They were never viewed or adequately pursued. ... I think the wheel was made during the White House Conference. There's no need to reinvent it now.

"I think we have seen in the last 20 years a breakdown of the family," he said. "If we don't make the family pivotal, I don't think we'll survive."