Opportunities for Policy Leadership on Paid Sick Days

- How do paid sick days promote a healthy and productive workforce?
- What are policymakers doing to ensure workers have paid sick days?
- Where can I get more information?

Comments by: Senator Mary Ann Handley (CT)
Opportunities for Policy Leadership on Paid Sick Days

Employees benefit when paid sick days allow them to take time off from work without losing pay to recover from an injury or illness. However, there are also significant savings and rewards for employers and for society when workers can take paid sick days. Given these advantages, forward thinking states have focused their efforts during this session to ensure that workers have access to paid sick days.

The Need.

- Over 59 million workers (nearly half of the workforce) do not have access to paid sick days.¹
- Access varies by sector (private vs. public), employment type (full-time vs. part-time), and position.
  - Only 55% of private sector employees have paid sick days.¹
  - Only 16% of part-time workers have paid sick days.²
  - Those most likely to lack paid sick days include low wage earners, child care workers, and hotel and food service workers.¹

Chart Source: Lovell, V. (2004). No time to be sick: Why everyone suffers when workers don’t have paid sick leave, IWPR Publication B242. Washington, DC.

A Necessity for Workers.

Workers need access to paid sick days not only for their physical wellbeing, but for their personal and their family’s financial wellbeing.

- Taking time off to recuperate allows workers to heal faster from illness or injury.¹
- Many low-income earners do not have paid sick days and cannot afford to miss work, no matter how ill.¹
- Workers without sick days who stay home when they are sick risk losing their jobs, their health insurance³, and in most states would not be eligible for unemployment insurance.⁴

“In terms of public health policy, paid sick days are a proactive deterrent to the unnecessary spread of germs, virus, and resulting illnesses, so in my view should be made available to employees wherever possible. From an economic standpoint, it seems an employer would willingly invest in paid leave for an employee who is ill rather than risk widespread infection throughout the workplace”

Senator Mary Ann Handley (CT)
**A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE.**

Workers who come to work with a contagious illness risk infecting colleagues and clients.⁵

- Workers with the least access to paid sick days have the greatest direct contact with the public, such as food service workers.⁵
- Most child care workers do not have access to paid sick days, so they risk infecting their co-workers as well as the children in their care, who in turn can infect their parents and/or siblings.²

**A WAY TO PROMOTE A HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE.**

Many employers have recognized that providing employees with paid sick days is a smart business decision.

- Nearly half of employers reported that presenteeism—employees coming to work ill—is a problem in their organization because employees who come to work sick are less productive and more likely to infect co-workers.⁶
- Providing paid sick days is cost-effective. It costs less for employers to provide paid sick days than to absorb the costs associated with the decreased productivity of sick employees and the increased spread of illness that results when sick employees come to work.⁶
- Offering paid sick days is an effective employee retention strategy. Employees with paid sick days are less likely to seek other employment compared to those without this benefit.⁷

**A COST-EFFECTIVE MEASURE.**

Cost-estimate models indicate that providing paid sick days supports the financial health not only of working families, but of employers and states as well.

- Since workers take few sick days, the cost of providing paid sick days is minimal. Among participants in a National Health Interview Survey, zero was the most frequently reported number of sick days utilized, while the overall average for sick days taken was 1.8 days.⁸
- Workers who take paid sick days recover faster and are less likely to infect their workplaces or the public, which may reduce health care expenditures.¹
- When workers without sick days lose their jobs for staying home when they are ill, many must turn to welfare. Providing paid sick days ensures that these workers remain in the workforce.⁸

**AN ISSUE CONSTITUENTS SUPPORT.**

The majority of US adults support paid sick days legislation.

- Recent research indicates that 80% of US adults support legislation that would require employers to provide paid sick days to their employees.⁹
- Over three-quarters of US adults believe that there are negative financial consequences for employers who don’t provide paid sick days to their employees, including lower productivity and more frequent workplace accidents.⁹

**AN ISSUE ON THE NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENDA.**

Paid sick day legislation has been proposed or enacted at the federal, state and local levels. Policymakers can use this momentum to provide employees with paid sick days.

- **Federal**
  - The Healthy Families Act would ensure that all employees working 30 hours or more per week have seven paid sick days a year. While costing $3.04 per worker each week, the potential workplace savings from reduced turnover costs, decreased presenteeism, and disease prevention is far greater.⁷
- **State**
  - Fourteen states have already proposed legislation for paid sick days this legislative session.
  - Ten of these states have proposed legislation establishing nearly universal paid sick days for full-time employees (CT, FL, MA, MD, ME, MN, MO, MT, NC, VT).
- **Local**
  - A Madison, Wisconsin ordinance that was narrowly defeated would have ensured paid sick days for those employed in the city.
  - San Francisco, California has successfully passed an ordinance that ensures paid sick days for all employed in the city.

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Sources cited in this Policy Leadership Sheet


Where can I get more information?

- The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) -- www.clasp.org
  CLASP conducts cutting-edge research, provides insightful policy analysis, advocates at the federal and state level, and offers information and technical assistance on a range of family policy and equal justice issues for our audience of federal, state, and local policymakers.
- The Urban Institute -- www.urban.org/about/index.cfm
  The Urban Institute is a non-partisan economic and social policy research organization that gathers and analyzes data, conducts policy research, evaluates programs and services, and educates Americans on critical issues and trends.
- The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) -- www.iwpr.org/index.cfm
  The Institute for Women’s Policy Research is an independent, non-profit, research organization that focuses on issues of poverty and welfare, employment and earnings, work and family issues, health and safety, and women’s civic and political participation.

For more bills and statutes, visit wfnetwork.bc.edu/bills.php

Celebrating 10 years of the Sloan Network (1997-2007)
The Sloan Work and Family Research Network can provide you with additional research-based information about working families.
visit www.bc.edu/wfnetwork, email wfnetwork@bc.edu, or call 617.552.1708.