

Dear Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to support the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516/S. 636), which would create a national paid sick and safe days standard.

The Healthy Families Act would guarantee working people the ability to earn up to seven paid sick days a year to recover from short-term illnesses, access preventive care, care for a sick family member or seek assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. Without paid sick days, workers are forced to make impossible choices when illness strikes: stay home, lose pay and risk their jobs; or go to work sick, jeopardize their health and spread illness to their co-workers and communities. Paid sick and safe days help keep families financially secure, workplaces and communities healthy and productive, and businesses and the economy strong.

Forty-four locations in the United States, including ten states, have or will soon have paid sick days laws in place. These laws have helped to dramatically expand paid sick days coverage to more than 13 million workers who did not previously have paid sick time. A strong, growing body of evidence from jurisdictions that have had laws in place for years shows that paid sick days benefit workers and families. These studies also show virtually no adverse effects – and some positive effects – on businesses and local economies.¹

Despite substantial increases in access to paid sick days as a result of new laws, nearly one-third of the private sector workforce in the United States – at least 34 million people – cannot earn paid sick days to use when they get sick.² Millions more cannot earn time to care for a sick child or family member.³ Lower-wage workers, workers of color and hourly workers are least likely to have access to paid sick time.⁴

Unpaid, unprotected days off have stark consequences for working families. For a family without paid sick days, just 3.3 days of lost pay due to illness are equivalent to an entire month of health care, on average, and 4.5 days are equivalent to an entire month of food.⁵ Nearly one-quarter of U.S. adults (23 percent) report they have lost a job or have been threatened with job loss for taking time off work due to illness or to care for a sick child or relative.⁶

Paid sick days make business and economic sense. When sick workers are able to stay home, the spread of disease slows and workplaces are both healthier and more productive. Paid sick days also reduce “presenteeism,” the productivity lost when employees work sick, which is estimated to cost our national economy approximately \$160 billion annually (\$219.8 billion after adjusting for inflation) and surpasses the cost of absenteeism.⁷ Paid sick days also reduce workplace injuries: Workers who earn paid sick days are 28 percent less likely than workers who don’t earn paid sick days to be injured on the job – with an even greater difference among workers in high-risk occupations.⁸

Grave public health consequences can result when workers do not have paid sick days. Workers in jobs that require frequent contact with the public, including those in food preparation and service, personal home care and child care, are among the least likely to have paid sick days and the most likely to be unable to afford to take an unpaid day away

from work.⁹ Without paid sick days, workers are forced to take unpaid leave or work sick. Workers without paid sick days are more likely to report going to work with a contagious illness like the flu.¹⁰ This puts workers, customers and businesses in danger.

Ensuring all workers can earn paid sick days would significantly reduce health care expenditures. People without paid sick days are more likely to seek treatment at an emergency department because they can't take time off to get care during regular business hours.¹¹ If all workers had paid sick days, 1.3 million emergency room visits could be prevented each year, saving \$1.1 billion annually. More than half of these savings — \$517 million — would accrue to taxpayer-funded health insurance programs, such as Medicare, Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program.¹² Workers with paid sick days are more likely to get regular cancer screenings and preventive care,¹³ holding down health care costs and improving long-term health.

Paid sick days enable working parents to care for their children when they are sick — shortening recovery time and reducing community contagion. Unfortunately, more than half of working parents are unable to earn at least five paid sick days to use to care for a sick child.¹⁴ Parents without paid sick days are nearly twice as likely as parents with paid sick days to send a sick child to school or day care.¹⁵ When parents have no choice but to do so, children's health and educational attainment is put at risk — as is the health of classmates, teachers, school staff and child care providers.

Women are disproportionately affected by the nation's lack of paid sick days, which jeopardizes the economic stability of families increasingly dependent on women's wages. Women make up nearly half the workforce¹⁶ and nearly two-thirds of U.S. mothers are breadwinners or co-breadwinners for their families.¹⁷ Yet, overwhelmingly, mothers still have primary responsibility for selecting their children's doctors, accompanying children to appointments and getting them recommended care.¹⁸ Moreover, nearly four in 10 employed mothers (39 percent) say they alone must miss work when a sick child needs to stay home, compared to 3 percent of working fathers. Among these mothers, 60 percent are not paid when they take that time, up significantly from 45 percent in 2004.¹⁹

Like paid sick days, paid "safe" days are critical for workers' productivity, security and well-being. Ninety-six percent of employed survivors of domestic violence say they experience problems at work related to the violence.²⁰ And one-quarter to one-half of domestic violence survivors report losing a job in part due to the violence.²¹ Because survivors of domestic violence are at increased risk of harm during and shortly after separating from an abusive partner,²² it is essential that they be able to find shelter, file restraining orders, attend court dates or receive counseling to prevent further abuse and continue working.

The Healthy Families Act would strengthen workers and families, businesses and the economy. It would guarantee workers across the country the right to earn paid sick and safe days no matter where they live, bringing the rest of the United States in line with the states and cities that have passed these laws and much of the rest of the world.

We urge you to demonstrate your strong commitment to our nation's working families by supporting the Healthy Families Act. Thank you.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women
A Better Balance
AFL-CIO
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers
The Arc of the United States
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
BreastfeedLA
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Popular Democracy
Center for Public Policy Priorities
Center for WorkLife Law
Coalition for Social Justice
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Coalition on Human Needs
Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Community Service Society of New York
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Daily Kos
Demos
Economic Opportunity Institute
The Epilepsy Foundation
Equal Justice Center
Equal Rights Advocates
Faith in Public Life
Family Values @ Work
Farmworker Association of Florida
First Focus Campaign for Children
Florida Institute on Research and Education (FIRE)
Food Chain Workers Alliance
Futures Without Violence
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
Human Rights Campaign
Innovation Ohio
Interfaith Worker Justice
Jobs With Justice
Labor Project for Working Families
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Legal Aid At Work
Main Street Alliance

Maine Women's Lobby
Make it Work
Mi Familia Vota
Minnesota NOW
MomsRising
Mothering Justice
Movement Advancement Project
NAACP
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Jewish Women
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Physicians Alliance
National Physicians Alliance - New York Chapter
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
National Women's Law Center
NEAT - the National Equality Action Team
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New Jersey Policy Perspective
New Jersey Time to Care Coalition
New York Child Care Coalition
New York Paid Leave Coalition
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Ohio Women's Public Policy Network
Oxfam America
PathWays PA
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
People For the American Way
People's Action
Public Justice Center
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
SEIU 32BJ
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)
South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice
SWPA National Organization for Women
Trust for America's Health
U.S. Breastfeeding Committee
UltraViolet

Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation
United Auto Workers (UAW)
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Women Employed
Women's Law Project
Working Families Party
Young Invincibles
YWCA USA
ZERO TO THREE

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- 10 See note 6.
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