

Working Families Need Paid Leave!

Many CWA members and millions of workers across the country have little or no paid sick leave or paid family and medical leave. As of 2019, over 32 million workers in the United States lacked any form of paid sick days—including a majority of people working in the lowest paying jobs. High-risk food preparation and service workers and personal care workers are among the least likely to have paid sick days, although the services that they provide are among the most essential.

The COVID-19 crisis makes very clear why this is such a big problem--workers who are sick or are caring for family members who are sick could put their entire workplaces at risk by coming to work. However, because so many workers don't have paid leave, many are left with no choice.

The **Families First Coronavirus Response Act**, as introduced, began to address this problem by providing emergency paid leave for all workers, but unfortunately the bill was weakened due to demands from Senate Republicans and the White House. The final bill provides workers for both private and public sector employers with 10 days of emergency sick leave and 12 weeks of emergency care for children whose schools or care centers are closed--but only applies to companies with less than 500 employees, and creates an exemption process for companies with less than 50 employees.

Recently passed by House Democrats, the Heroes Act would close gaps in access, ensure support for family caregivers in addition to parents, and strengthen other aspects of the law. Specifically, it:

- Eliminates the 500+ employee exemption, but does not allow these employers to claim tax credits
- Eliminates the health care provider and emergency responder exclusions
- Expands emergency paid leave to cover the same purposes as emergency PSD

- Expands caregiving & medical reasons for taking leave, including to allow leave in the event of a public order for self-isolation
- Ensures that emergency FMLA leave does not count against your regular FMLA entitlement
- Expands access to public and nonprofit employees

While the bill extends the leave provisions until December 31, 2021, it stops short of enacting permanent change. Adopting universal paid leave would help workers and their families during the COVID-19 crisis and the need for these protections will not end with the current health crisis.

It is time for the Senate to pass the Heroes Act to ensure we close the paid leave loopholes in the *Families First Act* – but as importantly, Congress must establish permanent structures to guarantee all working people with the leave they need when they need it.