

## **Paid Sick and Family Leave**

When you or a family member gets sick, you shouldn't have to worry about losing pay, much less your job. But in America, workers are forced to make this choice every day. This is because the United States is the only nation out of 22 developed nations that doesn't guarantee the right to paid sick leave. As a result, nearly 45 million Americans lack access to paid sick leave. The effects of this shortfall can be felt throughout the nation as people struggle to make impossible decisions between their health and that of their families and their livelihood.

Currently, 7 US cities and one state have passed mandatory paid sick leave. This still leaves the majority of the country without guaranteed paid leave. In 2015, President Obama signed an executive order stating that any company that has a contract with the government must provide 7 days of paid sick leave to their employees. This action will provide paid sick leave coverage for over 250,000 employees. This executive order is a great start in providing paid sick leave but more must be done to ensure that all Americans can care for themselves and their families.

The Healthy Families Act, bipartisan legislation currently before the house and senate, would provide workers with the ability to earn 7 paid sick days a year that could be used to care for themselves or a family member. This will relieve employees of the burden of choosing between caring for themselves and losing pay or even their jobs. This leave could be used for care for themselves, a spouse, a child, a parent, or "any other individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship." This makes the Healthy Families Act inclusive of families of all kinds. The Act would mandate 7 paid sick days for companies with more than 15 employees and 7 unpaid sick days for companies with less than 15 employees.

Guaranteed sick leave is important for all workers, but it is especially important for people who work in low paying jobs and live pay check to pay check. These workers often have to choose between staying home sick and losing wages or going into work sick. Studies show that losing 3.5 days of work is the equivalent of losing a month's worth of groceries for a low income employee. Not only is this unhealthy for the workers, it leads to lost productivity in the workplace. Presenteeism or the practice of employees coming to work ill, costs \$180 billion every year in lost productivity. Not only does the worker suffer, their employer does as well. Paid sick leave is a win-win for both parties.

In addition, guaranteed paid sick leave relieves some of the caregiving burden disproportionately shouldered by women. For example, when a child becomes sick, usually the parent with the lower paying job will take time off to care for that child. Because of the gender wage gap and preconceived notions of familial roles among other factors, that parent is usually the woman. By ensuring all people have paid sick leave, men can assume some of the caregiving responsibility and allow women to attend work more.

Paid sick leave also signals to workers and the world that taking care of one's self and family is important and should be a priority. By allowing people to take time off to care for themselves and their family members, we signal to the workforce that their wellbeing is a priority for the employers. It also signals to the world that American workers' lives matter. We need to catch up with the rest of the developed world and guarantee paid sick leave for all workers.