

October 9, 2009

Dear Member of Congress:

We are writing to urge your support of the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 2460/ S. 1152), a groundbreaking piece of legislation that would guarantee workers up to seven paid sick days a year to recover from short-term illness, to care for a sick family member, for routine medical care or to seek assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. In this economic climate, a basic workplace standard of paid sick days would help prevent workers from being forced to choose between their own health or the health of their family—and their paychecks or even their jobs.

Workers have always needed to care for their children, families and elderly relatives, and at the same time, be productive, responsible employees. But today, when workplaces don't provide the basic labor standard of paid sick days, the economic security of workers and their families is at risk. Nearly half (48 percent) of private-sector workers do not have access to paid, job-protected time off to recover from illness or to care for a sick family member. Seventy-nine percent of low-income workers do not have a single paid sick day. Consequently, one in six workers report that they or a family member have been fired, suspended, punished or threatened with being fired for taking time off due to personal illness or to care for a sick relative, according to a 2008 University of Chicago survey.

As our population ages, more working families will be providing care for elderly parents—and will need paid sick days to do so. Caregiving takes a financial toll on working people, especially when they have to take unpaid time off from work. Over 34 million caregivers provide assistance at the weekly equivalent of a part-time job (more than 21 hours), and the estimated economic value of this support is roughly equal to \$350 billion. Among caregivers, 98 percent reported spending on average \$5,531 a year, or one-tenth of their salary, for out-of-pocket expenses.

The lack of paid sick days is also a public health concern. Workers who interact with the public every day are much less likely to have paid sick days. Only 22 percent of food and hotel workers have any paid sick days, for example. Workers in child care centers, retail clerks, and nursing homes also disproportionately lack paid sick days. When working people have no choice but to go to work sick, their colleagues and all others they contact face an increased risk of contracting illness. In this economy, businesses cannot afford “presenteeism,” when sick workers come to work rather than stay at home. “Presenteeism” costs our national economy \$180 billion annually in lost productivity, surpassing the cost of absenteeism. For employers, “presenteeism” costs an average of \$255 per employee per year.

The Healthy Families Act also would make paid time off available to victims of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault so they are able to seek assistance without fearing that their livelihood is in jeopardy. Although domestic violence, stalking and sexual assault affect both men and women, nearly one in three women in the U.S. report physical or sexual abuse by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives. And up to 85 percent of domestic violence victims miss work because of physical and sexual abuse. By enabling domestic violence victims to use paid sick days to care for their physical and mental health, find alternative housing or obtain a restraining order to prevent further abuse, the Healthy Families Act would help to ensure that these workers are not forced to choose between their income and their safety.

The FMLA does not guarantee workers paid sick days—and neither do any state laws. San Francisco, the District of Columbia and Milwaukee have passed ordinances requiring that private-sector employers offer paid sick days. Over a dozen cities and states are working to pass paid sick days laws to ensure this basic

labor standard becomes a right for all workers. But illness knows no geographic boundaries, and access to paid sick days should not be dependent on where a worker happens to be employed.

Our nation has a history of passing laws to help workers in times of economic crisis. Social Security and Unemployment Insurance became law in 1935; the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act became law in 1938, all in response to the crisis the nation faced during the Great Depression. Working people should not have to risk their financial health when they do what all of us agree is the right thing—recover from illness without jeopardizing the health of others, or care for a sick family member who needs them. Now is the time to put family values to work by adopting a basic workplace standard of paid sick days.

We urge you to demonstrate your strong commitment to our nation’s working families by becoming a cosponsor of the Healthy Families Act. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Alaska

Alaska Public Interest Research Group

California

9to5 Bay Area

9to5 Los Angeles

Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center
(San Francisco)

Young Workers United (San Francisco)

Colorado

9to5 Colorado

Connecticut

Connecticut Permanent Commission on the
Status of Women

Connecticut Working Families

District of Columbia

DC Employment Justice Center

Georgia

9to5 Atlanta

Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council

Georgia Stand-Up

Idaho

Idaho Women’s Network

Illinois

Women Employed (Chicago, Ill.)

ParentsWork (Evanston, Ill.)

Iowa

Iowa Commission on the Status of Women

Maine

Maine Business and Professional Women

Maine Centers for Women, Work, and
Community

Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Maine Equal Justice

Mainely Girls

Maine Women's Health Campaign

Maine Women's Lobby

National Association of Social Workers, Maine

National Council of Jewish Women Southern
Maine

WAGE Project Maine

Maryland

Montgomery County Commission for Women

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Paid Leave Coalition

New Hampshire

New Hampshire Commission on the Status of
Women

New Hampshire Women’s Lobby and Alliance

New Jersey

Family Voices—New Jersey

New Jersey Statewide Parent Advocacy
Network

New Jersey Time to Care Coalition

New Mexico

New Mexico Women's Agenda

New York

New York City Paid Sick Days Campaign

New York State Paid Family Leave Coalition

North Carolina

North Carolina Justice Center

Oregon

Children First for Oregon

Pennsylvania

PathWays PA

Texas

Workers Defense Project (Austin, Tex.)

Vermont

Vermont Livable Wage Campaign

Voices for Vermont's Children

Washington

Economic Opportunity Institute (Seattle)

Washington State Family Leave Coalition

Wisconsin

9to5 Milwaukee

Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin

Campaign Against Violence (Milwaukee)

Citizen Action of Wisconsin

Milwaukee Graduate Assistant Association

Sojourner Family Peace Center (Milwaukee)