



Working Sick, Getting Stiffed:

How Some of America's Biggest Companies Fail Their Workers
and Jeopardize Public Health

March 1, 2007

Prepared by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now
As part of ACORN's Healthy Workers, Healthy Families Campaign for Paid Sick Days

Headquarters:
1024 Elysian Fields Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70117

National Legislative Office:
739 8th St. SE
Washington, DC 20003

www.acorn.org
research@acorn.org

ACORN's Healthy Workers, Healthy Families Campaign calls on businesses to provide workers with a fair number of paid sick days a year. We also call on Congress and state legislatures to pass laws guaranteeing that all workers have paid sick days.

Nearly half of American private-sector workers have no guaranteed paid sick days – yet everyone gets sick and everyone needs time to get well. Workers also have families and responsibilities to care for sick children and other relatives who need them.

ACORN called 50 of the largest food service and retail companies operating in America and asked if they provided their hourly workers with paid sick days. Despite the close contact with the public that characterizes jobs in these industries, a near-majority of the companies for which we gathered information were clear that they did not offer paid sick days to hourly employees:

- 48% (12) provide no paid sick days at all to hourly workers.
- Only 40% (10) provide any paid sick days to hourly workers in the first year.

All of the companies surveyed that provide no paid sick days are large and profitable. They should have to do better.

This report includes the following sections:

- Introduction to some basic facts about paid sick days
- The results of our survey of large food service and retail employers
- Stories from workers with no paid sick days
- ACORN's policy recommendations and campaign demands
- An appendix with the full survey results and additional worker stories



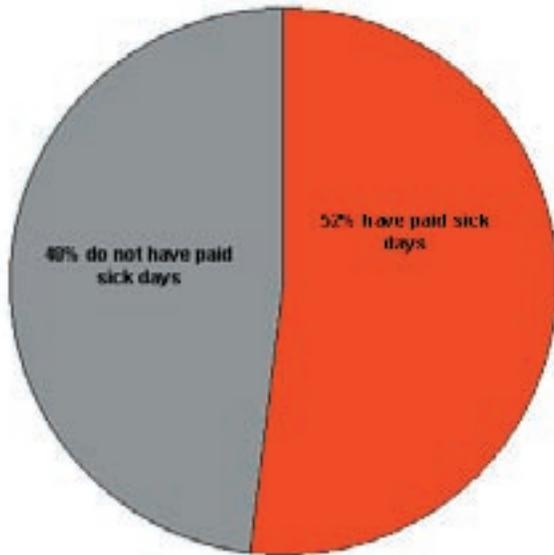
Connecticut ACORN members testified on February 20th in support of a Paid– Sick Days bill in the Connecticut General Assembly.

Introduction: No Time to Get Sick

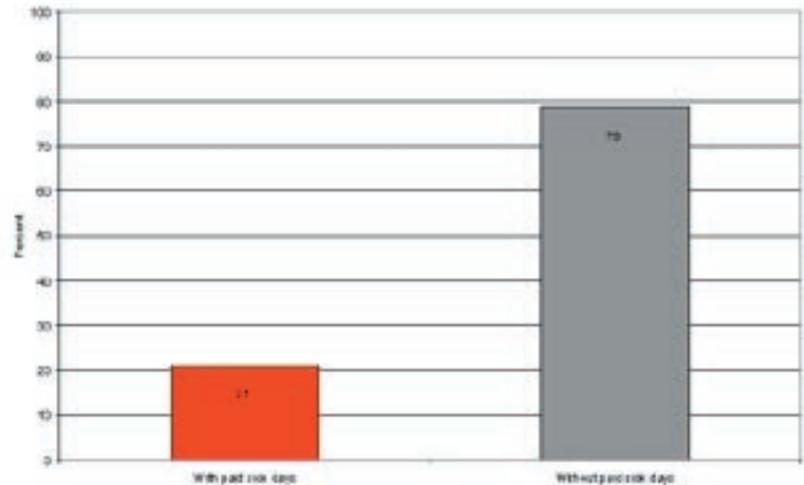
Everyone gets sick – it’s just a fact of life. Yet, the reality facing workers – especially working parents - is daunting:

- Nearly half (48%) of private-sector workers have no guaranteed paid sick days.
- More than 3 in 4 low-wage workers (79%) lack a single guaranteed paid sick day.
- 85% of workers in the food service industry have no paid sick days.

Percent of Private Sector Workers With Paid Sick Days



Percent of Low-Wage Workers With Paid Sick Days



Notes: Excludes agricultural, military, private household, and self-employed workers.

Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

Workers in some sectors of industry fare worse than others in terms of paid sick days. According to an analysis of government data by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, outlined in the chart below, fewer than 1 in 4 workers in the accommodation (hotel) and food service industry get paid sick days (and this statistic includes CEOs, managers, accountants, etc). As our survey results reveal later in this report, even many of the largest employers in these categories do not provide guaranteed paid sick days.

Worker eligibility for employer-provided paid sick days policies in the private sector, by establishment characteristics, 2006	
Industry	Percent of workers with employer-provided paid sick days
Accommodation and food service	22
Construction	25
Administration and waste services	31
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	35
Retail trade	45

Mining	49
Other services	49
Manufacturing	52
Transportation and warehousing	56
Real estate and rental	67
Educational services	68
Professional and technical services	69
Wholesale trade	71
Health care and social assistance	71
Information	74
Management	77
Finance and insurance	82
Utilities	85
All	52

Note: Excludes agricultural, military, private household, and self-employed workers.

Source: Institute for Women’s Policy Research analysis of the March 2006 National Compensation Survey, the November 2005 through October 2006 Current Employment Statistics, and the November 2005 through October 2006 Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

The data make clear that companies fail to provide their workers with guaranteed paid sick days. The result is that people are going to work sick, getting their co-workers sick, and staying sick longer. This also means that people who have to stay home because they are too sick to work – or their child is too sick to go to school - lose pay and get behind on bills and/or get written up at work, and risk losing their jobs. American businesses should be required to do better.

Providing workers with the security of paid sick days is a basic matter of fairness. According to one poll, 4 in 5 Americans believe that employers should be required to provide paid sick leave. ¹ ACORN believes:

- Workers shouldn’t have to choose between going to work sick and losing a day of pay.
- Parents shouldn’t have to choose between taking care of a sick kid and a day of pay. People should be able to work hard and take care of their families.
- Every one gains. Workers will have time to get well and return to productive work, children and family members will receive the care they need, employers will experience savings in reduced turnover and consumers will be less likely to catch an illness from public spaces.

Survey results: Do large food service and retailers provide paid sick days?

Over the period January 29-February 26, ACORN national staff called corporate headquarters of major employers in the food service and retail sectors of the economy. The call list consisted of the 25 largest food service companies as identified in Nation's Restaurant News last June² and the 25 largest retailers, as identified on www.store.com for 2006.³ In some cases where we could not obtain information from corporate personnel, we made additional calls directly to store managers themselves (see "Notes on methodology" below).

Of the 50 companies ACORN staff called, we were able to get a clear answer on paid sick day policies from 25, or 50%. Of these 25:

- 48% (12) provide no paid sick days at all to hourly workers.
- 3 (12%) provide no paid sick days in the first year of employment.
- 40% (10) provide some paid sick days to hourly workers in the first year.

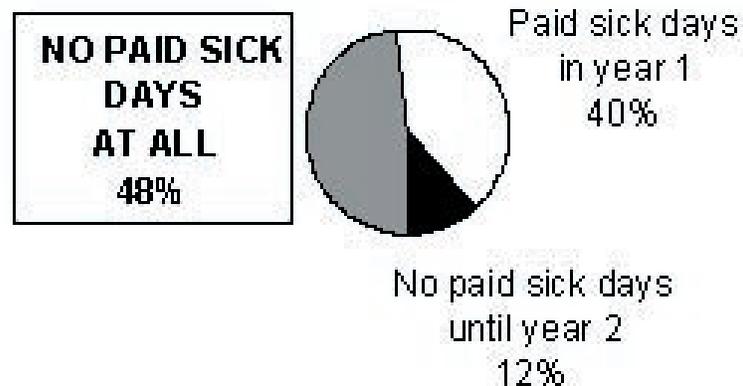
Note on determination of paid sick days policies:

In presenting the results of our phone survey below, we have been generous in our characterization of companies' paid sick days policies. For example, for the purposes of this report, we are categorizing companies as "providing paid sick days" even if:

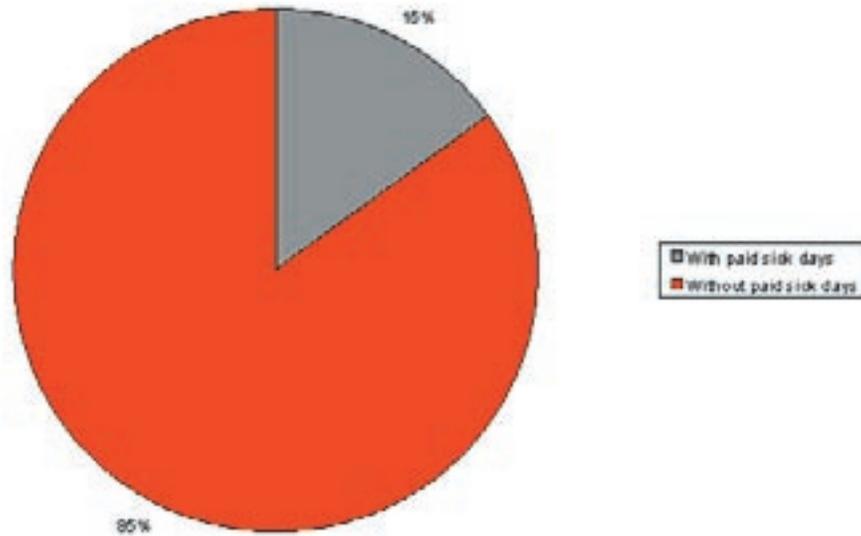
- ✓ They do not provide paid sick days in the first year of employment
- ✓ They do not provide paid sick days to part time workers
- ✓ They require workers to use "personal days" as sick days
- ✓ They provide less than a week of paid sick days (e.g. fewer than 5)

The lack of authorized sick days for workers to use to care for a child or family members is an especially serious problem. Eighty-six million working Americans do not have paid sick days to use to care for a sick child. Recent research finds that parents without at-home caregivers need about 4 days per year just to care for sick school-age children. Having no paid time off means that children often go to school sick, spread illness, miss important doctor visits, and experience worse short- and long-term health outcomes.

Percentage of Companies that have:



Percent of Food Service Workers With Paid Sick Days



So out of the 25 of the largest retailers and food services companies we reached, only 40% of the workers have any form of paid sick days in their first year of work. This is consistent with (in fact worse than) the national data – and certainly not adequate for people to live decent and productive lives.

Lack of Paid Sick Days is a Public Health Concern

National data show that workers who disproportionately lack paid sick days work with the public every day. Only 15% of frontline food service workers have any paid sick leave [see chart below]. Workers in childcare centers, retail clerks, and nursing homes also disproportionately lack this important benefit.

Our phone survey results dramatically confirmed these statistics. Disturbingly, 100% of the restaurant companies for which we were able to get information did not provide any form of paid sick days to their frontline hourly workers. From restaurant managers we interviewed, we heard “No, we don’t have anything like that. And you won’t find many in this industry that do.” More than once we heard “Let me know if you do find anyone providing paid sick days because I need a job like that.”

Healthy workers are critical to a productive and vibrant economy. When workers go to work sick, all are at risk of increased contagion. By providing paid sick days, employers and reducing the spread of contagion in the workplace – and the costs associated with increased absences and loss of productivity – while supporting healthy workers and healthy families.

Making Money, Failing Workers: Companies denying workers paid sick days

According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, our national economy would experience a net savings of \$8.2 billion per year if workers were provided just 7 paid sick days per year.⁴ Despite this fact, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business associations have already announced their opposition to this modest labor standard. Predictably, they argue that businesses “can’t afford” to let workers stay home when they are sick.

What follows are profiles of companies in our survey that do not provide sick days to their hourly employees⁵:

Cracker Barrel:

Cracker Barrel Old Country Store headquartered in Lebanon, Tennessee, operates 553 full service “country store” restaurants and gift shops which are located in 41 states, primarily the southeast, mid-west, mid-Atlantic and southwest United States. All of their stores are company owned; they do not sell franchises.

- **Number of Employees:** 75,029 (2005)
- **Net Income:** \$166 million (2006)
- **CEO pay:** Cracker Barrel CEO, Michael A. Woodhouse, had a total compensation of \$8,865,193 including stock option grants in 2006.

Jack in the Box, Inc.:

Jack in the Box Inc. owns, operates and franchises Jack in the Box quick-service hamburger restaurants and Qdoba Mexican Grill fast-casual restaurants. In 2006, the Jack in the Box system included 2,079 restaurants, of which 1,475 were Company operated and 604 were franchise-operated.

- **Number of Employees:** 600 (2005)
- **Net Income:** \$33 million (2005)
- **CEO pay:** CEO Linda A. Lang, had a total compensation of \$2,890,882 including stock option grants in 2006.

Kohl's Corporation:

Kohl's Corporation operates family-oriented, specialty department stores. As of 2006, they were operating 732 stores in 41 states.

- **Number of Employees:** 107,000 (2006)
- **Net Income:** \$224 million (2006)
- **CEO pay:** CEO R. Lawrence Montgomery had a total compensation of \$1,646,877 including stock option grants in 2006.

Darden Restaurants Inc.

Darden operates 1,427 restaurants including 682 Red Lobsters, 582 Olive Gardens, as well as others under the names Bahama Breeze, Smokey Bones, and Seasons 52.

- **Number of Employees:** 157,300 (2006)
- **Net Income:** \$338,200,000 (2006)
- **CEO pay:** In 2005, Darden's CEO, Clarence Otis, raked in \$3,633,552 in total compensation including stock option grants.

Brinker International Inc.

Brinker International operates more than 1,600 restaurant locations in 49 states and 20 countries. Its flagship Chili's Grill & Bar chain boasts about 1,200 restaurants. Brinker also operates the Italian-themed Romano's Macaroni Grill, with more than 240 locations, as well as smaller chains such as On The Border Mexican Grill & Cantina and Maggiano's Little Italy.

- **Number of Employees:** 110,800
- **Net Income:** \$212,400,000 (2006)

- **CEO pay:** In 2005, Brinker CEO, Douglas H. Brooks, raked in \$2,884,971 in total compensation including stock option grants.

OSI Restaurant Partners, Inc.

OSI – best known for its flagship Outback Steakhouse (with 930 locations) – claims more than 1,300 locations in the US and 20 other countries. OSI also operates 200 Carrabba's Italian Grill restaurants, along with such concepts as Bonefish Grill, Cheeseburger in Paradise, and Fleming's Prime Steakhouse.

- **Number of Employees:** 95,000 (2005)
- **Net Income:** \$146,800,000 (2005)
- **CEO Pay:** In 2005, OSI CEO A. William Allen raked in \$21,959,401 in total compensation including stock option grants from OSI Restaurant Partners Inc.

McDonald's Corp.

With more than 31,800 flagship restaurants serving burgers and fries in more than 100 countries, McDonald's is more than a household name. Almost 30% of its locations are company-owned; the others are run by franchisees. The company also operates Boston Market and Chipotle Mexican Grill restaurants.

- **Number of Employees:** 447,000 (2005)
- **Net Income:** \$2,602,200,000 (2005)
- **CEO Pay:** In 2005, James A. Skinner raked in \$3,429,800 in total compensation including stock option grants from McDonald's Corporation. From previous years' stock option grants, the McDonald's Corporation executive cashed out \$729,144 in stock option exercises.

Wendy's International Inc.

There are more than 6,700 Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburger eateries in the US and about 20 other countries.

- **Number of Employees:** 57,000 (2005)
- **Net Income:** \$224,100,000 (2005)
- **CEO Pay:** In 2005, John T. Schuessler raked in \$5,333,852 in total compensation including stock option grants from Wendy's International Inc.

Ruby Tuesday, Inc.

There are more than 880 Ruby Tuesday locations in the US and about a dozen other countries.

- **Number of Employees:** 38,900 (2006)
- **Net Income:** \$101,000,000 (2006)
- **CEO Pay:** In 2005, Samuel E. Beall raked in \$5,315,223 in total compensation including stock option grants from Ruby Tuesday Inc.

Burger King Holdings, Inc.

There are more than 11,100 Burger King restaurants in the US and about 65 other countries.

- **Number of Employees:** 37,000 (2006)
- **Net Income:** \$27,000,000 (2006)
- **CEO Pay:** During the last fiscal year, CEO John Chidsey received \$7,950,000 in pay, including salary and bonuses.

Applebee's International, Inc.

With more than 1,800 of its signature Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar locations across the US and in more than a dozen other countries, Applebee's markets itself as a community-minded family restaurant.

- **Number of Employees:** 32,260 (2005)
- **Net Income:** \$101,800,000 (2005)
- **CEO Pay:** In 2005, Applebee's International Inc. CEO Lloyd L. Hill raked in \$2,974,047 in total compensation including stock option grants.

Clearly, these are large and profitable companies. They can afford to provide paid sick days to their workers.

The Human Cost: Working without paid sick days

People who don't have paid sick days are faced with an untenable choice: go to work sick and therefore get sicker or do not go to work and then get behind on their bills. In sum, they are not able to take care of their families as they would like. Here are some examples of what happens to people who work hard but whose employers do not provide them with this needed benefit.

Here are a couple stories from people without paid sick days. A longer list of stories is appended to this report.

Elnora Collins – Chicago, IL



Elnora Collins is 57 year-old homecare worker. She is raising her 2 granddaughters, ages 16 and 17, alone. Ms. Collins has been in the home care field for years, and at her current job for a year and half. She has no paid sick days (or health care). Ms Collins suffers from hypertension and – because of her low income – has had no choice but to go to work sick many times.

Recently, she went to work sick and her symptoms were exacerbated by the stresses of work. “I got so sick I threw up at my client’s house,” she says. She left work to go to the doctor and was immediately sent to the hospital with an irregular heartbeat. Hewing strictly to their no-paid-sick-days policy, her employer only paid her for two hours that day.

The doctor advised her to take time off, but a day after her release, she returned to work, convinced that she would be disciplined if she didn't. “The only time I would EVER not go to work is if I was in hospital,” she says. “I just can't afford to lose a day of pay.”

Ms Collins loves caring for older citizens and objects to having to expose them to her own illnesses. “They are elderly and vulnerable to illness. And they are all low-income and can't afford to get sick either,” she says. “This just isn't right.”

Elnora loves her job and does not want to desert her clients, but is frustrated that she is put in a position that is unhealthy for her and her clients. Elnora's supervisors get paid sick days and personal days.

Stephanie Scott - Washington D.C.

Stephanie works full-time as a daycare teacher. Even though illness tends to spread among children and teachers, the center doesn't provide teachers any paid sick days. This worsens the cycle of illness.

Recently, Stephanie, a diabetic, fell so ill she missed a full week of work without pay. Though Stephanie had a doctor's recommendation that she rest for a week, her supervisors made it clear that if she took too many unpaid days off, they would look to replace her.

At \$9.50 an hour, Stephanie is the sole breadwinner for her 11-year old daughter and her husband, who is out of work. She pays \$800 in rent. A week without pay – half a month's rent - caused Stephanie and her family to fall behind on rent and bills. It has been three months since Stephanie missed work and she is still trying to catch up on rent and late fees, all due to missing a week without pay.

As a parent, Stephanie is conflicted about what to do when her daughter is ill. Recently, she sent her daughter to school when she knew she was sick because she wasn't sure her supervisors would tolerate her absence. After two hours, the school nurse called Stephanie at her job, requesting that she come pickup her sick daughter from school. “I didn't want to do it – it's just ridiculous – but this way at least I earned two hours pay and my supervisors had confirmation that my daughter was really ill. I thought they'd be less likely to discipline me then.”

“When you miss even one day, it's really hard,” Stephanie said. “You're playing catch-up all the time. There's so much hard work that we do at the center. If it weren't for the staff, the center wouldn't succeed. I think they should give something back.”



ACORN's Demands

ACORN members believe that:

- **Parents shouldn't have to choose between taking care of a sick kid and a day of pay.** People should be able to work hard AND take care of their families.
- **Healthy workers are critical to a productive and vibrant economy.** By providing paid sick days, employers would benefit from reduced turnover, higher productivity, and reducing the spread of contagion in the workplace.

ACORN therefore is demanding that:

- 1) **All companies provide paid sick days for workers to use to get well or to care for a sick family member.**
- 2) **The US Congress pass the Healthy Families Act.** The federal Healthy Families Act would require employers of 15 or more to provide seven (7) paid sick days a year for workers to use themselves or to care for a sick family member.
- 3) **State legislatures pass laws requiring employers to provide paid sick days.** In 2007, ACORN members are working to pass such legislation in states including Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

Notes on Methodology:

- All calls were made between the dates of January 29-February 26, 2007.
- Companies were chosen as stated above: The call list consisted of the 25 largest food service companies as identified in Nation's Restaurant News last June and the 25 largest retailers, as identified on www.stores.com for 2006.
- Staff first called Corporate Headquarters of all 50 companies listed, asked to speak someone in the Human Resources or Benefits department. When someone was reached, ACORN staff said they were doing research into corporate sick leave policy and asked the following questions:
 - 1) Does the company provide entry-level hourly employees with paid sick days separate from vacation days?
 - 2) How many?
 - 3) When do people qualify for the first one?
 - 4) Can people take a paid sick day if their child or family member is sick?
 - 5) If there are only "personal days", can an employee take them off without any notice (and therefore arguably use them as one would need to use a sick day)?
- In some cases, conversations with corporate personnel were supplemented by information on company websites and – in one case only – with company-issued written personnel policies/guide to benefits.
- Because in so many cases corporate personnel were unwilling to disclose company policies, ACORN staff supplemented these calls to corporate headquarters with calls to actual store managers in the field. At least three of these store calls were made in at least three different states before a company's policy on paid sick days was said to be determined.

Appendix A: Phone Survey Results

Category	Rank in category	Company	Other brand names	Has specific paid sick days in the first year	Has specific paid sick days after 1 year	Can use personal days as sick days without notice or penalty
Food Service	1	Compass Group PLC	Wolfgang Puck	Insufficient info		
Food Service	2	McDonald's Corp.		No	No	No
Food Service	3	Yum! Brands Inc.	KFC, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut	Insufficient info		

Food Service	4	Darden Restaurants Inc.	Red Lobster, Olive Garden	No	No	No
Food Service	5	Aramark Corporation		Insufficient info		
Food Service	6	Sodexo Alliance		Insufficient info		
Food Service	7	Starbucks Corporation		Insufficient info		
Food Service	8	Brinker International Inc.	Chili's	No	No	No
Food Service	9	OSI Restaurant Partners Inc.	Outback Steakhouse	No	No	No
Food Service	10	Wendy's International Inc.		No	No	No
Food Service	11	Jack in the Box Inc.		No	No	No
Food Service	12	CBRL Group Inc.	Cracker Barrel	No	No	No
Food Service	13	Chick-fil-A Inc.		Insufficient info		
Food Service	14	Marriott International Inc.		Insufficient info		
Food Service	15	Autogrill SpA	HMS Host, etc.	Insufficient info		
Food Service	16	Bob Evans Farms Inc.		Insufficient info		
Food Service	17	Ruby Tuesday Inc.		No	No	No
Food Service	18	CKE Restaurants Inc.	Hardee's, Carl's Jr, etc.	Insufficient info		
Food Service	19	Carlson Cos. Inc.	TGI Friday's	No	No	No
Food Service	20	Applebee's International Inc.		No	No	No
Food Service	21	Host Hotels & Resorts Inc.		Insufficient info		
Food Service	22	Burger King Holdings Inc.		No	No	No
Food Service	23	Landry's Restaurants Inc.		Insufficient info		
Food Service	24	Cheesecake Factory Inc.		Insufficient info		
Food Service	25	MGM Mirage		Insufficient info		
Retail	1	Wal-Mart		Yes		
Retail	2	Home Depot		Insufficient info		
Retail	3	Kroger		Insufficient info		
Retail	4	Sears Holdings	Sears, Kmart	No	No	Yes
Retail	5	Costco		Insufficient info		
Retail	6	Target		No	No	Yes
Retail	7	Lowe's		Yes		

Retail	8	Walgreens		Yes		
Retail	9	Albertsons		Insufficient info		
Retail	10	Safeway		Insufficient info		
Retail	11	CVS		No	Yes	
Retail	12	Best Buy		Yes		
Retail	13	Ahold	Stop & Shop, Giant	Insufficient info		
Retail	14	Federated Dept. Stores		Yes		
Retail	15	Publix		No	Yes	
Retail	16	JCPenney		Insufficient info		
Retail	17	Rite Aid		Insufficient info		
Retail	18	Delhaize America	Food Lion, Kash n' Karry	Insufficient info		
Retail	19	Staples		Not sure	Yes	
Retail	20	TJX	Marshalls, TJMaxx	No	Yes	
Retail	21	Gap		Yes		
Retail	22	Office Depot		Yes		
Retail	23	Kohl's		No	No	No
Retail	24	7-Eleven		Yes		
Retail	25	Meijer		Insufficient info		

Appendix B: Compilation of personal stories from workers without paid sick days

No Time to Get Sick: Working Without Paid Sick Days

Worker stories compiled by ACORN February/March 2007

Elnora Collins - Chicago, IL

Elnora Collins is 57 year-old home care worker. She is raising her 2 granddaughters, ages 16 and 17, alone. Ms. Collins has been in the home care field for years, and at her current job for a year and half. She has no paid sick days (or health care). Ms Collins suffers from hypertension and – because of her low income – has had no choice but to go to work sick many times.

Recently, she went to work sick and her symptoms were exacerbated by the stresses of work. “I got so sick I threw up at my client’s house,” she says. She left work to go to the doctor and was immediately sent to the hospital with an irregular heartbeat. Hewing strictly to their no-paid-sick-days policy, her employer only paid her for two hours that day.

The doctor advised her to take time off, but a day after her release, she returned to work, convinced that she would be disciplined if she didn’t. “The only time I would EVER not go to work is if I was in hospital,” she says. “I just can’t afford to lose a day of pay.”

Ms Collins loves caring for older citizens and objects to having to expose them to her own illnesses. “They are elderly and vulnerable to illness. And they are all low-income and can’t afford to get sick either,” she says. “This just isn’t right.”

Elnora loves her job and does not want to desert her clients, but is frustrated that she is put in a position that is unhealthy for her and her clients. Elnora’s supervisors get paid sick days and personal days.

Stephanie Scott - Washington D.C.

Stephanie works full-time as a daycare teacher. Even though illness tends to spread among children and teachers, the center doesn’t provide teachers any paid sick days. This worsens the cycle of illness.

Recently, Stephanie, a diabetic, fell so ill she missed a full week of work without pay. Though Stephanie had a doctor’s recommendation that she rest for a week, her supervisors made it clear that if she took too many unpaid days off, they would look to replace her.

At \$9.50 an hour, Stephanie is the sole breadwinner for her 11-year old daughter and her husband, who is out of work. She pays \$800 in rent. A week without pay – half a month’s rent - caused Stephanie and her family to fall behind on rent and bills. It has been three months since Stephanie missed work and she is still trying to catch up on rent and late fees, all due to missing a week without pay.

As a parent, Stephanie is conflicted about what to do when her daughter is ill. Recently, she sent her daughter to school when she knew she was sick because she wasn’t sure her supervisors would tolerate her absence. After two hours, the school nurse called Stephanie at her job, requesting that she come pickup her sick daughter from school. “I didn’t want to do it – it’s just ridiculous – but this way at I earned two hours pay and my supervisors had confirmation that my daughter was really ill. I thought they’d be less likely to discipline me then.”

“When you miss even one day, it’s really hard,” Stephanie said. “You’re playing catch-up all the time. There’s so much hard work that we do at the center. If it weren’t for the staff, the center wouldn’t succeed. I think they should give something back.”

Valerie Dorsey - Wilmington, DE

Valerie worked full-time for SPI chemical company for more than 15 years. The job exposed employees to dangerous chemicals and strenuous activity, and workplace injuries were common. Still, Valerie had no paid sick days and no paid personal days.

Valerie endured many on-the-job injuries over the years, and each time, the company pressured her to work through the pain. In one incident, Valerie was cleaning filters with an acid mix and began to feel severe pain in her stomach. She soon had trouble walking and became disoriented. The managers told her to move to a nearby building and keep working, which she did.

“The company looked down on ill or injured workers. Management shunned you if you had an injury,” Valerie said. “The common practice was to work through the pain or use vacation days when you got so hurt you couldn’t come to work. We never had time to heal. Our union once tried to fight for paid sick days, but the management sought out the strongest union leaders and made them personnel. This made it too difficult to win paid sick days or much else.”

In another incident, Valerie injured herself while helping to move steel bins full of material that weighed more than 2,000 pounds. “The bins moved on a conveyer and were so heavy that the conveyer chains would break. We’d get long poles and jar the bins aside so we could fix the chains.”

Valerie eventually suffered an upper body strain, and her doctor recommended that she take time off to allow her body to heal. Fearing a reprimand, however, Valerie returned to work and soon after re-injured her upper back. She finally decided to leave the chemical company. It has been four years since Valerie worked for SPI, and she’s still in constant pain.

Peter - Minneapolis, MN

A longtime ACORN member, Peter works for a childcare center. He doesn’t receive any paid sick days. Peter’s experience at the childcare center underlines many of the problems associated with a lack of paid sick days.

Peter works at the childcare center nearly 40 hours a week, filling in for other teachers who are absent. Teachers are sick so often, Peter works full-time. As Peter explains, “Someone on staff is probably gone every day because of some sort of illness.” Still, some teachers come to work sick and illnesses spread between the teachers and children.

Many times, parents bring sick children to the center because the parents don’t have paid sick days themselves and can’t afford to stay home to care for their kids. When kids are too sick, parents must be called to retrieve them, often forfeiting pay. “We have parents come in crying because they have to leave work to pick up a sick kid and have no other options,” said Peter. “It’s hard to miss a day without pay.”

Herbert Morris - Hartford, CT

Mr. Morris worked for 36 years in a steel fabrication plant without a single day of paid sick or personal leave. This was a hardship to him and his family – because he of course got sick from time to time, forfeiting pay when he simply couldn’t physically work. He knows that he and other workers in the plant who came in sick jeopardized the safety of other workers by doing so, but admits they really had no choice.

R.R. - Washington, D.C.

R.R. works for a movie theatre 35-40 hours a week. He has worked there for three years without any paid sick days and without any paid personal leave.

When R.R. has a cold, he goes to work because “taking a day off is too expensive.” Since he has worked for the theatre, R.R.’s rent has gone up three times, making it difficult for him to make ends meet.

According to R.R., it is also unnerving to miss days since people who miss days, even for valid reasons, can lose their jobs. Co-workers who have missed work to care for elderly family members or children have been reprimanded and have lost their jobs.

Alex Cotto - Hartford, CT

Mr. Cotto is a cook at Rainforest Cafe who has no paid sick days. When he calls in sick, knowing he shouldn’t be in the kitchen of a restaurant, his boss lets him know if he doesn’t show up it will go in his employee file as an unexcused absence, too many of which will lead to dismissal.

Craig - Wilmington, DE

Craig works 80-90 hours a week and has been employed for approximately six months. He is currently employed with a trucking company. He was told at the commencement of his employment that he would be terminated if he missed a day. He hates the policy, but gets paid decently and puts up with it. He states that his boss says, “If you want to work then work. If you don’t want to work, then don’t work. There is no reason to miss a day.” According to Craig, people are terminated if they take one day off.

“M. M.” - Bridgeport, Connecticut

M.M. – who would not give full name for fear of being fired - works as a home care worker caring for the elderly. She has

been working with this particular agency for four years. She stated, “Sometimes my pinched nerve causes me severe pain and I can barely walk.” On those days she can’t go to work, and her pay is docked accordingly, causing financial hardship.

F.W. -Washington, D.C.

F.W. (no full name to protect identity) is a daycare worker. She has worked full-time at a daycare center for seven years without receiving any paid sick days or paid personal days.

F.W. regularly drags herself to work while ill. Parents do the same, dropping their children off at daycare with colds and other illnesses. “When a child is sick, parents allow the child to stay at daycare because they can’t get off work to pick up the child. We give them our germs. They give us their germs. Then the whole place has germs.”

Alexander - Bridgeport, Connecticut

Alexander is a Tent Constructor. He has been working with his company for two years and has no paid sick days. He currently works 40 or more hours per week.

Alexander has one small child and cannot afford to take off when he or his child is sick. He states, “I got money problems if I don’t go to work. It sucks.” He was very concerned about this issue because, “It just isn’t fair. When my baby is sick, it’s hard to find someone to care for him.”

Dora - Bridgeport, Connecticut

Dora works for a home cleaning agency and has two daughters – ages five and eight. Dora has worked for the home cleaning agency more than a year without paid sick days. Dora says, “When I get sick, I got to choose between losing money, getting others sick, or finding a sitter, which is extremely difficult.”

(Endnotes)-

¹ September 2004: Struggling to Make Ends Meet: Public Polling of Low-Wage Worker, Corporate Voices for Working Families, conducted by Peter D. Hart Associates and Wirthlin Worldwide, September 2004, surveyed 804 registered voters nationwide (+/- 3.5%) and a national sample of 583 low-wage workers (error margin +/- 4.1) and 6 focus groups were conducted in 2004 as well.

² Nation’s Restaurant News, June 26, 2006, Pg 75. See pd link from <http://archives.If.com/docview.cfm?ID=2006177499413&OID=LFC07036CEH> <http://www.stores.org/pdf/06%20JULY%201-100%20Chart.pdf>.

³ <http://www.stores.org/pdf/06%20JULY%201-100%20Chart.pdf>

⁴ Vicky Lovell, Valuing Good Health: An Estimate of Costs and Savings for the Healthy Families Act, Institute of Women’s Policy Research, 2005.

⁵ For all company information provided in this section, sources were 1) Hoover’s Company Fact Sheets, available online at www.hoovers.com, 2) AFL-CIO Executive Paywatch, available online at www.aflcio.org/corporatewatch/paywatch 3) Yahoo! Finance Company Profiles, available online at finance.yahoo.com and various corporate websites.