

The Healthy Families Act

115th Congress: (H.R. 1516 /S.636)

PROBLEM

More than **37 million U.S. workers in the private sector aren't able to earn a single paid sick day**, despite tremendous progress enacting laws at the state and local levels. Without a national paid sick days guarantee, research shows that nearly one in four workers report having lost a job or being threatened with job loss for needing sick time – and the consequences for workers and their families, businesses, public health and our economy are significant.

These consequences can be especially devastating for workers of color, particularly Latino and Native American workers, who are some of the least likely to have access to paid sick time.

SOLUTION

The Healthy Families Act would establish a **national paid sick days standard** to ensure **workers are able to earn one hour of job-protected paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, up to 56 hours (seven days) per year** for a comprehensive range of needs. In doing so, it would help working families meet their health and financial needs, boost businesses' productivity and retention rates and strengthen the economy.

Key Elements

The Healthy Families Act would create a national paid sick days standard so workers can take time away from work **to recover from illness; care for a sick child or family member; obtain preventive care for themselves or a family member; attend school meetings related to a child's health, disability or special needs; and seek domestic violence services** without risking financial instability. It would:

- ▶ Allow workers in **businesses with 15 or more employees** to earn job-protected, *paid* sick time; workers in businesses with fewer than 15 employees would earn job-protected, *unpaid* sick time, unless their employers choose to offer paid sick days;
- ▶ Allow **employers to require certification if an employee uses more than three paid sick days in a row**. For survivors of domestic violence, the certification may be from a law enforcement officer or survivor advocate.

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- ▶ **Allow employers to use their existing policies**, as long as they meet the minimums set forth in the Healthy Families Act for time, types of use and method of use, and give employers flexibility as to how they define a “year” for the purposes of accrual.

Talking Points

Why does the United States need a federal paid sick days law?

- ▶ Nearly one in three working people – or more than 37 million private sector workers – in the United States don’t have access to paid sick days, threatening their financial security, their health, and the health of our communities.
- ▶ It is difficult for people to afford the basics like food and housing – much less get ahead – when they must miss work and lose pay because of an illness.
- ▶ For an average family without paid sick days, losing a little less than three days of pay due to illness can mean the loss of an entire month’s grocery budget.
- ▶ Workers without paid sick days – regardless of socioeconomic status – are significantly less likely to use preventive health care services, including seeing or talking to a doctor, receiving blood pressure, cholesterol or blood sugar checks, or even getting a flu shot.
- ▶ Only 14 percent of women fast food workers – and a mere 6 percent of those paid less than \$9 per hour – say they have paid sick days, creating obvious public health risks.

What have we learned about the effects of state and local paid sick days laws on businesses and communities?

- ▶ There are now 40 local and state paid sick days laws that are, or will soon be, in place in the United States. Paid sick days laws have made a substantial difference in increasing workers’ access to this basic protection. This is especially true among lower-wage workers and those in service jobs.
- ▶ The surge of paid sick days laws in cities, counties and states clearly demonstrates the need – and public support – for the policy.
- ▶ Existing laws show that public paid sick days policies work well – workers and families do better, businesses benefit and communities are healthier.
- ▶ Employers in localities with laws already in place generally favor those laws, and those jurisdictions have seen job and business growth.

Why is the Healthy Families Act the right policy?

- ▶ Access to sick time shouldn’t depend on where a person lives or works. Everyone should be able to recover from illness or care for a sick loved one without risking financial insecurity or job loss.
- ▶ The Healthy Families Act is a common sense bill that would establish a much-needed national paid sick days standard, allowing people – no matter where they live or work – to earn time to recover from illness, care for a sick loved one or seek medical care.
- ▶ The Healthy Families Act is also critical for survivors of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault, who would be able to use the time to seek help and assistance.

Is a federal paid sick days law something workers and families even want?

- ▶ In 2016, 82 percent of voters said it is important for the new president and Congress to consider a federal paid sick days law.¹
- ▶ And 83 percent of 2016 voters in states with elections for U.S. Senate in 2018 said it's important for policymakers to consider laws like a paid sick days guarantee.²

Press Statement Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

Contact: [Name, Email Address, Phone Number]

[Organization Name] Urges [State] Lawmakers to Support the Healthy Families Act – Much-Needed National Paid Sick Days Legislation

[CITY, STATE] – [Date] – “U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) reintroduced the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516/S.636) – legislation to establish a national paid sick days standard. This is great news for the [#] people in [City/State Name] and millions across the country who cannot earn a single paid sick day, and for anyone who supports stronger and healthier communities. Members of Congress who believe people shouldn't have to lose a job or risk financial insecurity when illness strikes should co-sponsor this bill and prioritize its passage.

Paid sick days laws now exist, or will soon exist, in 40 jurisdictions across the country, and evidence shows that these policies are working well. Research shows there are significant benefits for working people and their families, businesses and the economy. *[If there is a law in your state or in localities in your state, consider including a description.]*

Despite this progress, more than 37 million private sector workers in the United States cannot earn job-protected sick time to use to recover from illness; care for a sick child or family member; attend a school meeting related to a child's health, disability or special education needs; obtain preventive health services; or seek assistance for domestic violence. Access to this time should not be based on geography or winning the 'boss lottery.'

At [Organization Name], we care deeply about workers' ability to meet their health needs. We applaud the members of Congress who have already shown their support for this bill. We urge the congressional delegation here in [State Name] and all members of Congress to join them in standing up for workers, families and communities by co-sponsoring the Healthy Families Act and passing it right away.”

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Letter to the Editor Templates

Please consider working with your organization’s members and supporters to submit letters to the editor (LTEs) – or submit your own – to raise awareness about the need for paid sick days and, specifically, the Healthy Families Act.

If the article you want to respond to doesn’t specifically mention paid sick days or the Healthy Families Act, you may still be able to raise the issue. Look for connections between the article’s content or theme and paid sick days. For example, articles that address access to preventive health services, health care costs, minimum or fair wages, working conditions, community economic development and challenges for working parents all offer great opportunities to talk about the need for and importance of paid sick time.

Before submitting an LTE, check your specific outlet’s submission guidelines, especially maximum length (usually no more than 250 – 300 words) and the contact information you are required to provide. An LTE is not the best place for a nuanced policy argument or list of facts. Instead, keep it simple.

Note: *The following templates assume the writer is from a city or state without a paid sick days law. There are not currently paid sick days access calculations for states with existing laws. In those places, modify the language to reflect the national number of workers who do not have paid sick days – more than 37 million in the private sector.*

GENERAL/HEALTHY FAMILIES ACT INTRODUCTION

Dear Editor,

[Article Reference] from [Date]: People in [City/State Name] and across the country work hard every day, but many are one illness or sick kid away from financial hardship or job loss. That’s because [number without paid sick days] workers in [State Name] can’t earn a single paid sick day.

Fortunately, some members of Congress are trying to help fix the problem. The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516 /S.636), which is currently before Congress, is a common sense policy that would establish a much-needed national paid sick days standard that would allow all workers – no matter where they live or work – to earn job-protected time away from work to recover from illness or care for a family member, like a child with the flu.

Paid sick days laws have been tested and are working well in states and cities across the country, and all of the evidence shows they have a positive effect on families’ financial stability, businesses’ bottom lines and the public’s health. But the ability to earn sick time shouldn’t be based on where someone lives or winning the “boss lottery.” That’s why the Healthy Families Act is so important.

[State’s congressional delegation or specific member of Congress] should consider what is at stake for our communities when workers have to choose between a job and their health or their families when illness strikes. Eighty-two percent of 2016 voters said lawmakers

should address this issue. Congress must heed that call for action by passing the Healthy Families Act.

Sincerely,

[Name; Address; City, State; Phone Number; Email Address]

Approx. word count: 250

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Dear Editor,

[Article Reference] from [Date]: President Trump has so far talked about supporting working people, but there is no evidence that he plans to stand up for the strong and common sense policies we need, such as paid sick days.

Right here in [State Name], [number without paid sick days] workers can't earn even a single paid sick day. And nearly one in four people in this country – folks like those caring for our aging relatives and children, stocking the shelves in our grocery stores and preparing our dinners – say they have lost a job or been threatened with job loss because they needed time off due to illness.

Forty jurisdictions have, or will soon have, laws that guarantee paid sick time, and research demonstrates that workers and their families, businesses and local economies are benefitting. Still, more than 37 million U.S. workers in the private sector struggle without paid sick days protections, and we all suffer as a result.

Fortunately, the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516/S.636) – which would ensure workers have access to job-protected paid sick time, regardless of where they work – is currently before Congress. And 82 percent of 2016 voters – across party lines – said lawmakers should consider a federal policy like it.

If the president really wants to stand up for workers, joining supporters in Congress to help pass this popular and much-needed bill would be a meaningful start.

Sincerely,

[Name; Address; City, State; Phone Number; Email Address]

Approx. word count: 234

ECONOMIC SECURITY

Dear Editor,

[Article Reference] from [Date]: It is difficult for people to afford the basics like food and housing – much less get ahead – when they must miss work because they are ill and don't have paid sick time. Unfortunately, this is an all-too-common challenge for people across the United States, including [number without paid sick days] workers in [State Name] who don't have access to a single paid sick day.

For a typical family without paid sick time, losing a little less than three days of pay due to illness can cost an entire month's grocery budget. And nearly one in four people say they have been threatened with job loss or lost a job because they needed sick time. People simply should not have to choose between their economic security and their health or families when illness strikes.

[State delegation or specific member of Congress] should help by co-sponsoring the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516 /S.636), which would establish a national paid sick days standard. Eighty-two percent of 2016 voters said they think it's important for lawmakers to consider a policy like it. [City/State Name] families are counting on them to do just that.

Sincerely,

[Name; Address; City, State; Phone Number; Email Address]

Approx. word count: 194

WOMEN

Dear Editor,

[Article Reference] from [Date]: When women do better, families do better. That's why it's shocking that in [City/State Name], where women make up [state-specific percentage] percent of the workforce, approximately [number without paid sick days] people can't earn a single paid sick day.

Paid sick days are critical to the economic security of women and their families. Women are the sole or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of U.S. households. The vast majority are primarily responsible for their children's health. When working women without paid sick days get sick or their children become ill, they are too often forced to make impossible choices between their families' health and a paycheck or their jobs.

To make matters worse, the very professions dominated by women – food service, child care, retail and office administration – are some of the least likely to offer paid sick days. These jobs also tend to require public interaction and provide opportunities to spread illness throughout our communities.

[State congressional delegation or specific member of Congress] must stand up for working women by supporting a national paid sick days standard like the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516/S.636). It's the right thing to do for [City/State Name] families, businesses and public health.

Sincerely,

[Name; Address; City, State; Phone Number; Email Address]

Approx. word count: 202

PUBLIC HEALTH

Dear Editor,

[Article Reference] from [Date]: When working people can't earn paid sick time, it affects all of us. Right now, more than 37 million private sector workers across the country face an impossible choice when illness strikes: risk their economic security by staying home or their own and the public's health by going to work.

Adults without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely to go to work sick, and more than twice as likely to send a sick child to school or day care. And jobs requiring frequent public contact – like jobs in the fast food industry – are some of the least likely to offer paid sick days. The public health consequences are serious and obvious.

During the H1N1 outbreak, an estimated seven million people caught the flu from co-workers. Cities and states across the country have taken the lead on addressing this issue and research shows it has paid off – flu rates in places with paid sick days laws have dropped considerably since the laws took effect. It's no surprise then that 82 percent of 2016 voters said they think Congress should consider a national paid sick days law.

[State congressional delegation or specific member of Congress], stand up for our public health by co-sponsoring the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516 /S.636), which would guarantee all workers the right to earn job-protected sick time for all workers. Urge fellow lawmakers to do the same. Until we have a national standard, the health of all of our families and communities are at risk.

Sincerely,

[Name; Address; City, State; Phone Number; Email Address]

Approx. word count: 255

BUSINESS

Dear Editor,

[Article Reference] from [Date]: Forty jurisdictions now have, or will soon have, paid sick days laws in the United States. The growing body of evidence from these places is clear: Paid sick days are good for workers and families – and they make good business sense too.

Here are the facts: Paid sick days reduce turnover and the cost of hiring and training new employees. They decrease the productivity lost when employees work sick. And they help workers recover faster and obtain medical care, so they can return to work and prevent the spread of illness to co-workers and the public.

In San Francisco, where a law that lets workers earn paid sick days passed in 2006, two-thirds of employers say they support the law. They overwhelmingly report that profits haven't declined, and data show that the city has experienced job growth compared to surrounding counties. The state of Connecticut and the cities of Washington, D.C., and Seattle have had similar results: The number of jobs and businesses continues to grow.

So why is it that [number without paid sick days] workers in [State Name] can't earn a single paid sick day? [State congressional delegation or specific member of Congress] should weigh the facts – not the myths – and co-sponsor the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1516/S.636) today, which would establish a national paid sick days standard.

The Healthy Families Act would make offering paid sick days a universal practice – and ensure healthier workplaces, more satisfied and productive workers, and better bottom lines in the process.

Sincerely,

[Name; Address; City, State; Phone Number; Email Address]

Approx. word count: 254

Estimated Paid Sick Days Access Among Private Sector Workers in States Without Paid Sick Days Laws

(2013, Based on Institute for Women's Policy Research Modeling)

State	Number of Private Sector Workers	Workers Without Paid Sick Days	Percent of Workers Without Paid Sick Days
Alabama	1,503,549	671,099	44.6%
Alaska	244,138	106,353	43.6%
Arkansas	916,768	418,651	45.7%
Colorado	1,914,437	816,067	42.6%
Delaware	327,711	131,128	40.0%
Florida	6,395,740	3,009,437	47.1%
Georgia	3,246,180	1,433,384	44.2%

Hawaii	441,024	184,237	41.8%
Idaho	507,812	250,438	49.3%
Illinois	4,789,945	2,113,696	44.1%
Indiana	2,398,299	1,132,923	47.2%
Iowa	1,171,885	531,389	45.3%
Kansas	1,030,452	471,717	45.8%
Kentucky	1,425,227	642,164	45.1%
Louisiana	1,499,955	676,281	45.1%
Maine	468,832	198,391	42.3%
Maryland	2,073,631	811,254	39.1%
Michigan	3,458,223	1,612,270	46.6%
Minnesota	2,189,756	947,077	43.3%
Mississippi	873,230	409,904	46.9%
Missouri	2,181,522	1,002,116	45.9%
Montana	312,538	153,008	49.0%
Nebraska	720,466	333,851	46.3%
Nevada	996,378	487,869	49.0%
New Hampshire	519,667	202,223	38.9%
New Mexico	576,382	286,309	49.7%
North Carolina	3,275,755	1,462,772	44.7%
North Dakota	276,645	126,678	45.8%
Ohio	4,235,473	1,943,546	45.9%
Oklahoma	1,263,664	561,360	44.4%
South Carolina	1,548,236	719,706	46.5%
South Dakota	300,961	144,906	48.1%
Tennessee	2,189,272	979,907	44.8%
Texas	9,166,597	4,117,023	44.9%
Utah	980,071	445,582	45.5%
Virginia	2,831,315	1,171,183	41.4%

West Virginia	552,116	254,270	46.1%
Wisconsin	2,245,436	1,022,089	45.5%
Wyoming	189,327	82,510	43.6%

1 National Partnership for Women & Families. (2016, November). *Key Findings: 2016 Election Eve/Election Night Survey*. Retrieved on 26 September 2017, from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/key-findings-2016-election-eve-election-night-survey.pdf>

2 Ibid.