

# African Americans and Their Families Need Paid Sick Days

JANUARY 2017

Everyone gets sick, and everyone needs time to recover. Yet more than 7.3 million black workers – nearly 40 percent of black workers – in the United States cannot earn a single paid sick day, forcing them to choose between their health and the health of their families and their economic security when they get sick or need to care for a sick loved one.<sup>1</sup> The consequences can be devastating. It is past time for a national paid sick days standard that would protect the well-being of African Americans and all working families.

## Too Many African Americans are Forced to Choose Between Their Jobs and Their Health or Their Families

### A lack of paid sick days threatens African Americans' job security.

- ▶ Thirty-eight percent of African Americans – including 41 percent of black men and 36 percent of black women – cannot earn a single paid sick day.<sup>2</sup> When illness strikes, they must risk their jobs and financial stability by staying home, or their health and the health of their communities by going to work.
- ▶ Job loss due to illness is a serious threat for black families without paid sick days. Nationally, nearly one in four adults report having lost a job or being told they would lose a job for taking time off due to illness or to care for a sick family member.<sup>3</sup> Coupled with the fact that African Americans who are unemployed typically search for more than three months for a new job, job loss is a risk many black workers cannot afford to take.<sup>4</sup>

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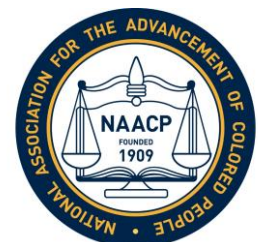
**“90 percent of African Americans support paid sick days legislation.”**

— National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, 2010

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### Getting sick can have serious economic consequences for African Americans without paid sick days.

- ▶ On average, black workers are paid less and have less savings and access to wealth than white workers. More than 30 percent of black households have no net savings or assets to draw on during an unexpected loss of income.<sup>5</sup> As of 2015, more than one in five black families (22 percent) were living in poverty.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Just a few days of lost pay is equivalent to losing an entire month's worth of groceries or health care expenses for a typical family without paid sick days.<sup>7</sup> Since



African American workers are paid less, on average, than white workers, a loss of income can add up even more quickly.<sup>8</sup>

### **Many black workers risk their health because they can't earn paid sick days.**

- ▶ Workers without paid sick days are less likely to go to the doctor or access preventive care.<sup>9</sup> This barrier to accessing care can be especially harmful to African Americans, who are 60 percent more likely to have diabetes than their white peers and have substantially higher mortality rates from stroke, heart disease and breast cancer.<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, 2.3 million previously uninsured black adults have gained health coverage.<sup>11</sup> However, in order to fully realize the benefits of health insurance, many African Americans still need job-protected time to seek care.

### **When black parents and caregivers are denied paid sick days, their entire families suffer.**

- ▶ The vast majority (80 percent) of African Americans with children under 18 were in the labor force in 2015,<sup>12</sup> and 81 percent of black mothers are primary breadwinners for their families. These working parents need time to care for their children when they get sick and time to take them for check-ups and immunizations.<sup>13</sup>
- ▶ African Americans tend to have significant adult and elder care responsibilities. One in five African Americans serves as a caregiver to an adult family member or someone close to them, and a majority of these caregivers (52 percent) work full time.<sup>14</sup> Black family caregivers who are denied paid sick days face additional – and sometimes impossible – barriers to taking time away from work to accompany their loved ones to doctor's appointments, administer medication or deal with a medical emergency.

## **Black Workers and Their Families Deserve a Solution**

**A national paid sick days law would enable millions of working people, including African Americans, to earn job-protected paid sick days.** Currently, seven states (Arizona, Connecticut, California, Massachusetts, Oregon, Vermont and Washington) and 32 localities have – or will soon have – paid sick days laws in place,<sup>15</sup> and a growing body of evidence shows that existing laws are working well.<sup>16</sup> Black workers are often at the center of campaigns to pass these laws, joining advocates for workers, women and children, as well as public health experts, to win these important protections.

**The Healthy Families Act would set a national paid sick days standard.** For businesses with 15 or more employees, the Healthy Families Act would enable working people to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year to recover from short-term illness, provide care for a sick family member, access preventive care or seek assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. Workers in businesses with fewer than 15 employees would earn up to seven job-protected unpaid sick days each year to be used for the same reasons, unless their employers choose to offer paid sick days. People across the United States – and especially African Americans – should have a fair shot at getting the care they need or caring for a loved one. Learn more at [PaidSickDays.org](http://PaidSickDays.org).

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1 U.S. Census Bureau. (2014). *American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates 2014, Sex by Age by Employment Status for the Population 16 Years and Over (Black or African American Alone)*, Table C23002B. Retrieved 17 January 2017, from [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_14\\_1YR\\_C23002B&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_14_1YR_C23002B&prodType=table); Xia, J., Hayes, J., Gault, B., & Nguyen, H. (2016, February). *Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings*. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 17 January 2017,

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- 2 Xia, J., Hayes, J., Gault, B., & Nguyen, H. (2016, February). *Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings*. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 17 January 2017, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-days-access-and-usage-rates-vary-by-race-ethnicity-occupation-and-earnings#sthash.2EEKh9Fj.dpuf>
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- 8 Black women who hold full-time, year-round jobs in the United States are paid, on average, just 63 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men while black men are paid just 72 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men. U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). *Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement: Table PINC-05: Work Experience in 2015 – People 15 Years Old and Over by Total Money Earnings in 2015, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex*. Retrieved 17 January 2017, from <http://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-05.html> (Unpublished calculation based on the median annual wages of white, non-Hispanic men, black women and black men who worked full time, year-round in 2015)
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The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](http://NationalPartnership.org).

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