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## Committee on Labor & Public Employee

*Senate Bill No. 601 An Act Mandating Employers to Provide Sick Leave to Employees*

Submitted by Amy Miller, Program & Public Policy Director

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Good afternoon. My name is Amy Miller and I am the Program & Public Policy Director at the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives.

For over 33 years, CWEALF has worked on issues to advance women's opportunities. We firmly believe that women should have access to benefits which ensure they can properly care for themselves as well as their families. Therefore, I am here today to testify on *Senate Bill No. 601 An Act Mandating Employers to Provide Sick Leave to Employees*.

According to Dr. Jody Heymann, a researcher at Harvard University, 76 percent of low-wage workers have no paid sick leave.<sup>1</sup> Information gathered from the Institute for Women's Policy Research, shows that more than 22 million working women lack basic sick day benefits.<sup>2</sup>

- 47 percent of women working in the private sector have no paid sick days
- In the industries that employ the most women – retail trade and accommodations/food service – 55% and 78 % of workers are without paid sick days. In those two industries alone, almost 9 million women lack paid sick days.
- 27% of low-income women (with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level) put off getting health-care because they cannot take time off from work.
- 57% of women workers in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women are without paid sick days.

In *Paid Sick Days Legislation, A Legislator's Guide*, the Center for Law and Social Policy and the Women Legislators' Lobby make recommendations on how to provide access to paid sick days and how workers can accrue paid sick time. For example, for every 30 hours worked, a worker could earn one hour of paid sick leave up to an established maximum. This way, workers regardless of if they are full-time or part-time, still have access to paid hours but full-time workers get more simply because they work more hours.<sup>3</sup> There are numerous recommendations within this document that provide various alternatives based on the size of the business and the definition of the worker. Ultimately there are practical solutions for a problem for too many workers in Connecticut.

Supporting sick days makes good business sense. People who are sick should stay home so they can recuperate faster and not infect other workers. On average,

<sup>1</sup> Heymann, *The Widening Gap*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, February 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *Paid Sick Days Legislation: A Legislator's Guide*, November 2006, Center for Law and Social Policy and the Women Legislators' Lobby

workers need about a week of sick leave each year to take care of their own health needs. Forty-four percent (44%) of corporate human resource executives say that 'presenteeism' (employees coming to work when they are ill) is a problem for their companies<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, people cannot afford to miss days at work. Many people live paycheck to paycheck and missing one day can mean the difference of paying the rent or mortgage for the month.

CWEALF has advocated on behalf of federal and state family and medical leave laws. Last week marked the 14<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of FMLA. FMLA is important to ensure people can keep their jobs while they care for themselves or a family member. What FMLA does not do is provide paid time off **AND** the federal FMLA covers only employers with 50 or more employees. According to the 2000 Census, 94% of all Connecticut businesses had less than 50 employees the benchmark needed to qualify for unpaid time off. Connecticut would make an important step in the ensuring the families have some protection when they need to take time off for an illness. Women continue to be over represented in part-time and low-wage jobs, the ones most likely not to provide paid sick days. It is for these and numerous other reasons that I am here today to urge you to support SB 601 – having paid sick days will give the women in Connecticut an opportunity to remain healthy, productive workers.

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<sup>4</sup> CCH Incorporated, *2003 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey*, October 2003, <http://www.cch.com/press/news/2003/200321022h.asp>