

Testimony of Sharon Patterson Stallings  
Joint Committee on Labor & Public Employees  
February 24, 2009

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As a member of ACORN, an elected member of the Hartford School Board, a community leader, and a public education activist, I am here to express my strong support of HB6187 to provide a minimum number of paid sick days to Connecticut workers. This bill is pro-worker, pro-family, pro-business AND a protector of the public health.

As you may know, ACORN has been a leader on campaigns to improve the lives of workers and their families for decades. We fight for affordable housing, fair lending, better public schools and a living wage. ACORN is also strongly committed to winning paid sick days. We see enacting a paid sick days standard as an important investment in Connecticut's working families. It would also shore up the investments our state has already made in things such as raising the minimum wage and enacting local living wage laws. After all, what good is raising the minimum wage if that wage is eroded simply because a worker has a common cold? Or their child has the flu? What good is health care if you can't take a day off to take your child to the doctor without losing pay?

Last year, Governor Rell put out a public service message that encouraged sick workers to stay home and get well. We agree with this in principle – staying home when you're sick protects other workers and the workplace productivity and public health. *However, unless we pass this law protecting workers wages, that message simply ignores the realities of many of our lowest income workers and families who live paycheck to paycheck, and in fear of losing their jobs.* These families have no choice but to go to work sick if the alternative is falling behind on rent, utilities, going into collections on an unpaid bill, or being fired.

Since we began organizing around this issue last year, ACORN members and staff have been knocking on doors, talking to our members, neighbors, family and friends about this issue and we have found strong support. We will continue lobbying, building our base of support, collecting stories of workers without paid sick days, and talking to the media *until no one in our state has to risk their job in order to care for their family, or put their loved ones at risk in order to keep their job.*

Our fight here in Connecticut is part of a growing national movement for paid sick days. Many more states are considering paid sick days laws as we speak - such as Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and California. The cities of San Francisco, Washington D.C. and Milwaukee already have such a law on the books and it's working well.

Too often family values end at the workplace door. We can do better than that. Connecticut has long been a leader in setting decent labor standards – like our minimum wage. We should be proud of that fact – and see this paid sick days issue for what it is: a long-overdue minimum standard designed to protect the health of our workers, our families, our public spaces and our economy overall.

A recent nationwide poll of likely voters found that the public overwhelmingly supports establishing a minimum standard of paid sick days – 82%! We trust that you, our elected officials, will listen to the people and pass this paid sick days law now. I can assure you that ACORN members intend to fight until workers in this state aren't forced to choose between their health and their paycheck.

Thank you.