

William Harshaw
41 Royal Oak Road
New Britain, CT

I have worked at a restaurant chain owned by Specialty Restaurant Group LLC for over 10 years, and have been a cook for over 30 years. My duties include working the grill, managing the fried foods, and in an average shift I serve approximately 500 people. I work a full 40-hour week, and there are typically 10 or 12 other employees working beside me in the kitchen. In my career as a food-service preparer, I have never been provided paid sick time.

My fiancé, Luz, and I are homeowners – we bought our home 2 years ago, and were sold a sub-prime mortgage. We are working to prevent foreclosure and have managed to keep our house, but are struggling to make ends meet and stay in our home. Missing a day or two of pay is completely out of the question.

Since I have no paid time off, I go to work when I get sick, and continue to serve those 500 customers, and work alongside my colleagues. I feel bad about going to work and spreading my cold, but I absolutely cannot miss the pay, especially in this economy – and I'm not the only one. Sometimes during flu season, illness will spread through the kitchen staff all at once. Just this January there was an outbreak of disease, with cooks, dishwashers and wait-staff sneezing, coughing, and sharing aspirin. We all follow the rules about washing hands and keeping sanitary, but a sick employee is still a hazard. The signs in the restaurant bathrooms are a nice gesture, but do little to help me get well or keep our customers from catching our germs.

After serving so many people every day, bringing in so much revenue for the restaurant, and being a loyal employee of 10 years, I would have expected to be given a benefit as basic as a few paid days off every year when I'm ill. The only solution I see is to legislate this policy so that I do not need to continue to work sick. I encourage the members of this committee to pass HB 6187 for paid sick days.