

Council 4 AFSCME Labor Committee Testimony, February 24, 2009

Council 4 AFSCME supports SB HB 6187, AAC Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees. My name is Brian Anderson. I am a legislative and political representative for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 Connecticut public and private employee members.

The respected Institute for Women's Policy Research estimates that only 60% of Connecticut's workers have sick leave. That means that over 655 thousand workers in our state do not. Institute research shows that granting sick days economically benefits workers, employers and our society in the long run.

Economic benefits aside, this is a common sense public safety bill. When workers report to work sick, there is a good chance that they may spread the sickness. This makes even more workers sick and risks spreading the illness to even more people. This is a particular problem when these workers are in service industry jobs such as working at a restaurant, hotel or retail establishment. A sick worker could unwittingly and unintentionally spread the flu or other ailment to the very customers that they serve. Unfortunately, it is workers in just such jobs that often are not given paid sick days off by their employers. We submit a fact sheet from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services concerning the deadly avian flu. It says "The Centers for Disease Control ... and other leading public health experts agree that it is not a question of IF a pandemic will occur, but WHEN it will occur." It goes on to say in comparing an avian flu outbreak to the 1918-1919 flu pandemic that "if a pandemic of similar severity occurred today,... two million Americans could die." This bill will safeguard the public.

Council 4 also urges you to pass:

- SB 362, AAC Equal Pay for Equal Work
- SB 365, AAC Captive Audience Meetings

Though Council 4 is generally supportive of creating a more equal playing field for binding arbitration we do not support the means of doing this in SB 804, AAC Municipal Binding Arbitration. Council 4 believes that a better way would be to make binding arbitration truly "binding," rather than creating greater ability to reject arbitration decisions. At this time we are not advocating changes in the current law.



IV. Fact Sheet: Pandemic Flu Basics

The threat of a flu pandemic is real. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading public health experts agree that it is not a question of IF a pandemic will occur, but WHEN it will occur. Preparing now will make a difference to you and your family during a pandemic.

What is a flu pandemic?

A flu (influenza) pandemic is an outbreak of a new flu virus that spreads around the world. The virus will spread easily from person to person, mostly through coughing and sneezing. Because the virus is new to people, everyone will be at risk of getting it.

What are the effects of a flu pandemic?

A flu pandemic will have a significant impact on society. A pandemic could result in a large number of people falling ill, including children and young adults, with many deaths. A pandemic could also require restrictions on travel, alterations to normal business operations, and dismissal of students from school to help slow the spread of infection.

The United States was overwhelmed by the 1918–1919 flu pandemic, which caused the deaths of at least 675,000 Americans. If a pandemic of similar severity occurred today, 90 million Americans could become ill, and approximately 2 million Americans could die.

In addition to the impact on human health, a flu pandemic presents a major threat to the world economy.

Why should we be concerned now?

CDC and other leading public health experts agree that the threat of a flu pandemic is real—it's not a question of IF one will happen, but WHEN it will happen. They are concerned now that the H5N1 virus (bird flu) is changing and could evolve into a pandemic flu virus.

Why should we prepare now?

It is impossible to predict when the next flu pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. Regardless of where a pandemic starts, everyone around the world will be at risk. If you do not take steps to prepare *before* a pandemic, it will be harder for you to follow important health advice *when* a pandemic occurs.

What are the symptoms of a pandemic flu infection?

The symptoms of a pandemic flu infection will likely be similar to those of seasonal flu, but they may last longer and be more severe.

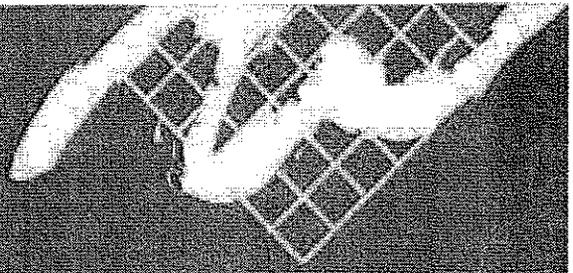
Will there be a vaccine available for pandemic flu?

A vaccine for pandemic flu may not be available for 4-6 months after a pandemic starts, and even then, it may only be available in limited amounts.

Will we need to wear facemasks and respirators during a flu pandemic?

If used correctly, facemasks and respirators may help prevent some exposure to flu viruses. However, facemasks should be used along with other preventive measures, such as frequent hand washing.





Paid Sick Days Improve Public Health by Reducing the Spread of Disease

Paid sick days can reduce the spread of disease at work and in child-care settings, creating significant public health benefits and a more productive workforce.¹ That's why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that workers with the flu stay home.² Yet many workers cannot do so without losing income or their job.

Nearly Half of all Workers Lack Paid Sick Days

Barely half of all workers (51 percent) have paid sick days, and only one in three (30 percent) have sick days to care for sick children.³ As a result, many employees cannot afford to stay home until they are well, and others lose their jobs if they miss work. Indeed, many workers who are covered by formal paid sick days policies are penalized for using that time.⁴ Low-wage workers are the least likely to have paid sick days—including many who deal directly with the public.⁵ (For instance, only four percent of restaurant workers have paid sick days.⁶)

Sick Workers Infect Co-workers and Customers, Increasing Work Absence and Health-Care Spending

- ▶ Paid sick days minimize the spread of the flu, a highly contagious ailment that accounts for 10 to 12 percent of all illness-related work absence.⁷ A sick worker can pass the virus on for up to seven days after symptoms appear⁸ and is likely to infect 1.8 of every 10 co-workers.⁹ Forty percent of workers report having contracted the flu from a colleague.¹⁰
- ▶ Other viruses can rapidly infect workers and customers in the hospitality and food service industries through contaminated food or beverages. A Nevada jury found that a viral outbreak that sickened hundreds at a Las Vegas hotel was caused by the lack of an adequate paid sick days policy, awarding \$25 million in damages to victims of the disease.¹¹
- ▶ Workers with the flu miss an average of two days of work and work a half day at half of normal productivity (while receiving full pay), for a total work loss of 2.25 days.¹² Nearly half (45 percent) will visit the doctor, at an average cost of \$122 for provider fees and prescriptions.¹³

Sick Children Miss Out When Their Parents Don't Have Paid Sick Days

- ▶ Pre-school-age children are the first to signal that the flu season has arrived.¹⁴ Child-care center rules require sick children to remain home, but in practice, when parents cannot get off work to stay home with them, many sick children do end up in care.¹⁵ This sets up an efficient process of contagion: from child to playmate, to playmates' parents, and to parents' co-workers.
- ▶ Children recover faster when their parents care for them,¹⁶ reducing health-care expenditures. Parents with paid time off are more than five times as likely as other parents to stay home with their sick children,¹⁷ yet only 41 percent of working mothers have paid sick days consistently.¹⁸ Nearly half (49 percent) lose pay when they stay home with a sick child.¹⁹

Until workplace policies and norms change so that all workers have paid sick days and are encouraged to use them when appropriate, many will continue to go to work when they have a virus. Workers may feel they are helping their employers and co-workers by dragging themselves to work, but this "presenteeism" hurts employers' profitability²⁰ and has significant negative public health implications that spread far beyond a single worksite.