



Connecticut Working Families

30 Arbor St. Suite 210
Hartford, CT 06106

February 25, 2010

To the Co-Chairs Representative Ryan and Senator Edith Prague and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee

**Testimony in support of SB-63 for Paid Sick Days
Submitted by Lindsay Farrell, Organizing Director**

Thank you all for allowing us to speak about the issue of paid sick days today. I am here to support SB-63.

Testimony has been submitted about the public health benefits of paid sick days legislation, as well as the improved health outcomes for employees. There is also testimony about the absolute need that the low-wage, hourly workers who would be covered by the bill have for even a few paid sick days a year. Also there is information about how this can help women and families struggling to balance care for their children with providing for them economically.

And despite all the positive impacts that this legislation could bring about, opponents still clamor that this policy could be bad for the economy. We all want businesses to thrive so that they can create more jobs, no one wants to set back job growth in Connecticut and policies that would do that would be a bad for our economy. Fortunately, all the actual data on this subject indicates that paid sick days do not hurt businesses or kill jobs.

I respectfully submit testimony about some things that are also bad for our economy:

Perpetuating Families' Economic Insecurity

Paid sick days are not about comfort for employees, they are about necessity.

- One in nine employees have been fired for calling out when sick, or calling out to take care of a sick child.¹ And these days, once a job is lost, it will be even longer before it is replaced, leaving a family without a significant portion, or without any income for weeks or months. Job-protected paid sick days literally keeps people in their jobs.
- 1/4 of working mothers miss pay when their child is sick,² leaving the whole family struggling to make ends meet. This means lost wages that would have gone towards energy bills, food or other essentials.

¹ NORC/Public Welfare Foundation research, June-July 2008.

² Kaiser Family Foundation, *Women, Work and Family Health: A Balancing Act*. April 2003

- One in six workers say they or a family member have been fired, suspended, written up or otherwise penalized by an employer – or threatened with such a penalty – for taking time off to cope with an illness.³

With wages stagnated or falling, and the cost of necessities – food, energy, rent, etc. – going up, more and more families live paycheck to paycheck and rely on every cent of their pay. Even missing 20% or 40% of a week's check for calling out with a virus for a day or two can be unmanageable. So imagine the impact to a family budget when someone is punished for calling out sick but having their hours cut, or their employment suspended, or even being fired.

Economic recovery starts with giving working families economic security. It begins with protecting their jobs and their purchasing power, so that they can keep in their homes in Connecticut, spend at Connecticut businesses, and remain financially independent. When the economy is bad, the thing to do is help the people for whom it is hardest.

The Unnecessary Spread of H1N2 in Workplaces

There is a cost to neglecting to prevent the spread of norovirus, flu, and other contagious ailments. By stalling to pass paid sick days legislation we miss the opportunity to limit the spread and avoid these costs.

A recent study revealed that in the United States 8 million people went to work while contagious with the H1N1 virus, and consequently spread the virus to other 7 million co-workers.⁴ That is millions of cases of H1N1 that could have been prevented, but that instead resulted in more absent employees, lost productivity, more costs to our health care system, and unnecessary strains on businesses and families all due to a lack of paid sick days policies. An ounce of prevention surely would have been worth a pound of cure.

Even before the H1N1 pandemic, the spread of illness from sick workers created problems and costs in Connecticut. The Ill Food Worker Educational Campaign, a project of The Food Protection Program of the Connecticut Department of Public Health, reports that since 2002, there have been more than 40 outbreaks of food-borne illness in Connecticut that have been associated with workers coming to work while sick and/or that have had workers that tested positive for norovirus. Ill workers have sickened many customers and in several cases caused the restaurants to close due to a lack of business.⁵ The National Restaurant Association (NRA) has estimated that the average cost of a foodborne illness outbreak to an establishment is about \$75,000.⁶

³ NORC/Public Welfare Foundation research, June-July 2008.

⁴ Robert Drago, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University, and Kevin Miller, Ph.D. "Sick at Work: Infected Employees in the Workplace During the H1N1 Pandemic," published by Institute for Women's Policy Research. February 2010.

⁵ Talking Points Flyer/Employee Health Policy Recommendations from the Ill Food Worker Educational Program, CT Dept. of Public Health

⁶ Manager Information Pamphlet from the Ill Food Worker Educational Program, CT Dept. of Public Health

Needless to say, the Connecticut Department of Public Health Recommends paid sick days policies.⁷ The increased expenses to business, increased costs to care for people who catch these illnesses and the avoidance of such illnesses are well worth it.

Increased Costs to Our Health Care System

When employees lack paid sick days, we all pay for it.

- According to the CDC half of stomach “flu”-related outbreaks caused by the norovirus are linked to ill food-service workers — and they are among the least likely to have paid sick days.⁸ This means that more people need to seek medical treatment, which in turn results in more claims to insurers.
- Employees without paid sick days are nearly three times more likely to lack a usual source for routine and preventive healthcare.⁹ This results in them using Emergency Rooms more frequently, their diseases becoming worse, often requiring more expensive care, and more hospitalizations.¹⁰
- A study conducted in Massachusetts concluded that 47% of emergency room visits could have been prevented by improving access to primary care. The cost for these preventable ER visits totaled \$959 million. By increasing preventive care, paid sick days help reduce hospitalization and healthcare spending.¹¹

All of these costs to our health care system are passed on to both families and employers in insurance premiums and procedure costs. There is a consensus that to help our economy thrive again, we must take action to reduce healthcare costs and spending since it is stifling our businesses and is a burden on family budgets. A basic workplace standard of paid sick days would contribute to a reduction in healthcare costs as well as better health outcomes.

Paid sick days are not just necessary for employees, they are a benefit to all of us. A basic workplace standard of paid sick days is good policy, and good policy is good for our economy.

Please support SB 63 for paid sick days.

Thank you.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ CDC, Norovirus Outbreak Associated with Ill Food-Service Workers, www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5646a2.htm, Jan. 2006.

⁹ Unpublished Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of the National Health Interview Survey

¹⁰ Human Impact Partners, “A Health Impact Assessment of The Healthy Families Act of 2009,” June 11, 2009

¹¹ Vickie Lovell and Kevin Miller, Paid Sick Days in Massachusetts: Containing Health Care Costs through Prevention and Timely Treatment. January 2009

