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Deborah Brody Chen, RN, BSN, of Cheshire, CT, Testimony IN SUPPORT of SB-913 for Paid Sick Days

February 25, 2011

Testimony for the Labor Committee on the Paid Sick Days Legislation:

I am a baccalaureate-degreed registered nurse with additional twenty years' training in Chinese Medicine. I serve on the medical unit at Middlesex Hospital, in Middletown, CT. Prior to entering nursing I ran a small business for ten years. I am also a single mother who has raised two children and been responsible for the health of our family.

As a health-care professional, as a former small business owner and as a mother, *I earnestly entreat all legislators of good wisdom, good will and good conscience to pass SB-913, an act mandating employers provide paid sick leave to employees.*

The statistical evidence and arguments relating to worker productivity, cost to businesses, public health and social welfare are already before you. [I refer you most specifically to Miller and Williams (2010) *Valuing Good Health in Connecticut: The Costs and Benefits of Paid Sick Days*, which is available at <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/family-leave-paid-sick-days>.]

For my part, I will tell you what I see in my home and in my work.

The foremost and best treatment for illness is prevention. The cycle of disease transmission is STOPPED when you avoid contact between infected individuals and others around them.

- ❖ When workers don't have paid sick leave they come to work sick. They infect their co-workers and they infect customers. *In my observation this occurs even when good hygiene practices such as hand washing and sanitizing of equipment is observed.*
- ❖ The workers who are most at risk of having no paid sick leave are also precisely those whose work puts them in the position to infect the broadest and most vulnerable segments of our population: grocery and food service workers, child and elder care workers, transportation workers.

SB 913 will remedy this situation and prevent the spread of disease precisely where we have left the greatest risk.

After prevention, the next best treatment for illness is proper hydration, nutrition and REST. Minor illness, if treated with hydration, nutrition and rest, will run its course in 24-72 hours. By contrast, if the individual works while sick the course of illness is protracted to anywhere from 10 days to three months. The risk of short-term exacerbation requiring hospitalization, *as well as the long-term issue of hastened onset, increased incidence and greater complexity of chronic degenerative diseases of old age* also *rises* with each untreated instance. This is my direct observation over twenty years as a mother, as a teacher and as a nurse in acute care.

Without paid sick leave, workers – especially low-wage workers – come to work sick and this sets in motion all of the adverse consequences of untreated illness and its attendant COSTS:

- ❖ Impaired productivity.
- ❖ Work errors.

- ❖ Emergency room visits / hospitalization for illness exacerbation.
- ❖ Future increased chronic disease burden for the society as a whole.
- ❖ Currently our nation devotes over 17% of GDP to health care. Emergency room as primary care facility, initial and repeat hospitalization for exacerbation of illness, and chronic disease burden of middle and old age are the three demographic features most responsible for the excessive cost of health care in this country. These three factors increase the demand for costly and repeat services and thus increase the cost that we all must pay: whether out of pocket as individuals, or via employer and employee premiums to private insurers, or by taxation to support programs such as Medicaid and Husky.

By mandating paid sick leave, SB-913 will prevent the adverse health consequences of untreated illness AND reduce the current excessive health care costs to individuals, businesses and the state.

Lastly, I would like to state that the mandating of paid sick leave is especially vital to women's health, and thus also the health of our children and our future.

- ❖ Women have always been the primary caregivers for all family members: children, elderly, and sick or injured spouses. With the vast majority of households now being either dual income or single parent, the burden upon women's shoulders is even greater. We are equal to the task, but we need the support of mandated paid sick leave to discharge our labors to family: so as to ensure family members' health, and so as to minimize the cost to society at large that would be necessitated by paying others to care for family members in our absence.
- ❖ In addition, paid sick leave is an essential link in the assurance of proper prenatal care, especially for low-income women. The dismal birth health and survival statistics of this country – 46th in the world, dead last amongst developed nations – attests to how critical this issue is already. The future health and wealth of our state and our nation depends on the health and vigor of our children, from pre-natal care forward.
- ❖ Finally, spousal abuse is a significant health issue for an all too large portion of our female population. Paid sick leave is an essential and supremely cost-effective link in the safety net to allow women to get timely treatment for injury without fear of loss of wages or employment, at precisely the time when every economic resource is absolutely indispensable to freeing themselves from the circumstances of abuse.

We the people look to you our elected representatives to enact laws to provide for the commonweal of our state. **SB-913, an act mandating that employers provide paid sick leave to employees** is a measure that will provide for the health of our citizens and the health of our economy. I sincerely ask you to make it law.

Respectfully submitted in public testimony,

Deborah Brody Chen, RN, BSN.