



913

**Written Testimony of Debra L. Ness
President, National Partnership for Women & Families
on S.B. 913, An Act Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees**

**Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly
Joint Committee on Labor and Public Employees
March 1, 2011**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 913. The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care, and policies that help workers in the United States meet the dual demands of work and family.

Like many across the nation, Connecticut's working families are struggling harder than ever to make ends meet. For workers without paid sick days, a bad case of the flu or a child's fever can mean the loss of a much-needed paycheck or even a job. Paid sick days policies protect workers' economic security and the health and well-being of their communities. Advocates and legislators in more than two dozen states and cities are pressing for policies that would provide working people the right to earn paid sick days, and two cities have already passed and implemented successful paid sick days laws. We commend the Connecticut legislature for considering this common-sense policy solution that will help hard-working people across the state to be both responsible workers *and* responsible family members when illness strikes.

**The Economic Security of Working Families and the Well-Being of Our Communities
Suffer When Workers Lack Paid Sick Days**

Everyone gets sick, but too many workers in Connecticut and across the nation cannot take time away from work to get better. The cost of allowing this to continue, and failing to enact a remedy, is high for Connecticut families, communities and businesses. That is why establishing a minimum paid sick days standard is so important.

More than half a million people in Connecticut — 39 percent of private sector workers — lack paid sick days to use for their own illness.¹ Connecticut's experience reflects the national reality. Thirty-eight percent of private sector workers in the United States lack paid sick days to use for

¹ Miller, K., and Williams, C. (2010, April). *Valuing Good Health in Connecticut: The Costs and Benefits of Paid Sick Days* (p. 6). Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved 25 February 2011, from <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/family-leave-paid-sick-days>

their own illness or medical care.² Many more cannot take paid sick time to care for an ill child or family member.³

In this economy, the lack of a paid sick days standard forces too many workers and their families to make the impossible choice between their health and their financial security. At a time when more than three-quarters of workers are living paycheck to paycheck,⁴ and an unemployed worker's search for a new job can stretch well beyond six months,⁵ workers without paid sick days can ill afford to lose two days of pay when they get the flu or risk job loss when they need to take a child to the doctor.

The lack of paid sick days has a particularly significant impact on working women, who continue to be the primary caregivers for their families. Half of working mothers miss work when a child comes down with a common illness, and many of these women — two-thirds of low-income mothers and more than one-third of middle- and upper-income mothers — lose pay when they care for sick children.⁶ Women are now the sole or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of U.S. households.⁷ There is no question that the economic security of families nationwide is put in jeopardy when working mothers have to miss work to care for an ill child.

Too often, workers without paid sick days are forced to go to work rather than care for their health, delaying preventive care or turning to emergency rooms instead of lower-cost health care options. In these cases, potentially treatable problems can become more severe. People without paid sick days are twice as likely as those with paid sick days to use an emergency room because of their inability to take time off of work,⁸ and parents without paid sick days are *five times* more likely to take a child or family member to an emergency room.⁹ In the ongoing national effort to improve the health of Americans and reduce health care costs, the lack of a paid sick days standard is simply bad policy.

What's more, the lack of a paid sick days standard creates serious public health risks. People without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely to go to work sick than people with paid sick

² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, March). *Table 6. Selected Paid Leave Benefits: Access*. Retrieved 25 February 2011, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs2.t06.htm>

³ Lovell, V. (2004). *No Time to Be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave* (p. 9). Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved 28 February 2011, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/no-time-to-be-sick-why-everyone-suffers-when-workers-don2019t-have-paid-sick-leave-b242>

⁴ All Headline News. (2010, September). *Survey: 77 Percent of American Workers Living Paycheck to Paycheck*. Retrieved 25 February 2011, from <http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7019767433>

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2011, February). *Table A-12. Unemployed persons by duration of unemployment*. Retrieved 25 February 2011, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t12.htm>

⁶ Kaiser Family Foundation. (2003, April). *Women, Work and Family Health: A Balancing Act* (p. 2). Retrieved 25 February 2011, from http://paysickdays.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/Women_Work_Family_Health.pdf?docID=366

⁷ Boushey, H., and O'Leary, A., eds. (2009). *The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Changes Everything* (p. 32). Center for American Progress and A Woman's Nation. Retrieved 25 February 2011, from <http://www.shriverreport.com/awn/shriverReport.pdf>

⁸ Smith, T., & Kim, J. (2010, June). *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences*. National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for the Public Welfare Foundation Publication (p. 40). Retrieved 2 December 2010, from <http://www.publicwelfare.org/resources/DocFiles/psd2010final.pdf>

⁹ Ibid. (Unpublished calculations).

days.¹⁰ And workers who have the most direct contact with the public are the ones least likely to have access to paid sick days. For example, nearly three out of four food preparation and food service workers have no paid sick days¹¹ and nearly two-thirds of restaurant workers report having worked sick,¹² potentially leading to the spread of contagious illnesses to customers. Similarly, just 27 percent of child care workers have paid sick days,¹³ risking the spread of contagious illnesses to young children. Nearly half of personal care workers (child care and home health care workers who assist the infirm and the elderly) lack paid sick time,¹⁴ causing potentially serious health problems for these vulnerable populations. When disease spreads because workers can't stay home, everyone loses.

Failing to provide workers with paid sick days can also cause a reduction in productivity — which has a ripple effect when disease spreads through the worksite. In fact, lost business productivity due to illness costs an estimated \$180 billion annually.¹⁵ A snapshot from the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 shows why. During a three-month period in the fall of 2009, 26 million workers suffered from H1N1 and eight million workers went to work sick, infecting up to seven million of their co-workers.¹⁶ H1N1 lasted longer in private sector workplaces than in public sector workplaces during those three months — a difference that researchers attribute to the lack of paid sick days in the private sector.¹⁷ Business productivity and efficiency suffer when illness overcomes the workplace.

S.B. 913: An Important First Step Toward Meeting the Needs of Connecticut's Workers and Their Families

The tremendous costs of inaction and the benefits that paid sick days policies have for working families, our public health, our children and our communities are clear. That is why the National Partnership supports a standard that would allow all workers to earn paid sick time. S.B. 913 is an excellent first step toward meeting the needs of more than a quarter-million Connecticut

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

¹¹ Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress. (2010, March). *Expanding Access to Paid Sick Leave: The Impact of the Healthy Families Act on America's Workers* (p. 2). Retrieved 22 February 2011, from http://jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=abf8aca7-6b94-4152-b720-2d8d04b81ed6

¹² Restaurant Opportunities Centers United. (2010, September). *Serving While Sick: High Risks and Low Benefits for the Nation's Restaurant Workforce, and Their Impact on the Consumer* (p. 11). Restaurant Opportunities Centers United Publication. Retrieved 9 December 2010, from [http://www.rocunited.org/files/roc_servingwhilesick_v06%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.rocunited.org/files/roc_servingwhilesick_v06%20(1).pdf)

¹³ See note 10, p. 3.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 8. Number applies to establishments with 15 or more employees.

¹⁵ Business Wire. (2002, June). *AdvancePCS Study Shows Top Health Conditions Cost Employers \$180 Billion in Lost Productive Time*. Retrieved 28 February 2011, from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_2002_June_5/ai_86738725/

¹⁶ Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2010, February). *Sick at Work: Infected Employees in the Workplace During the H1N1 Pandemic* (p.1). Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 7 January 2011, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/sick-at-work-infected-employees-in-the-workplace-during-the-h1n1-pandemic>

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

workers and their families.¹⁸ We look forward to the day when all Connecticut workers have access to paid sick time.

Paid sick days laws in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. have already had a dramatic impact on workers. A recent study of San Francisco workers shows that, as a result of the city's paid sick time law, many of the workers most in need of paid sick days now have access to them.¹⁹ As a result, more than a majority of workers say that they are better able to care for their own health needs and the health needs of their families, that their employers are more supportive of workers using sick time, or that they gained more sick time because of the floor set by the law.²⁰

There is also indisputable evidence refuting opponents' claims that paid sick days laws harm business and job growth. San Francisco's experience shows that businesses — including the smallest businesses — can flourish under a paid sick days standard. In the two years following the implementation of the city's paid sick days law (a time period that includes the recent recession), the number of businesses and jobs in San Francisco grew relative to business and job growth in surrounding counties.²¹ The growth pattern held true even in the industries that made the biggest changes as a result of the law — retail and food service.²²

The experiences of San Francisco businesses show that fears of disruption from a paid sick days standard are vastly overblown. For example, most businesses did not have to make any changes to their policies as a result of the law.²³ And two-thirds of businesses now say they support the law.²⁴ With respect to concerns that workers might overuse paid sick time, the data show that workers in the city used just three sick days per year on average, despite the availability of many more days under the law. One-quarter of all workers did not use *any* sick days within a one-year period.²⁵

A Paid Sick Days Standard: A Public Policy Solution That Works for Everyone

Everyone gets sick. Everyone should have time to get better without jeopardizing their economic security or their families' health and well-being. The National Partnership urges the Connecticut General Assembly to pass S.B. 913 without delay to protect the economic security of Connecticut's working families and the health and well-being of its communities.

¹⁸ See note 1, p. 1.

¹⁹ Drago, R. and Lovell, V. (2011, February). *San Francisco's Paid Sick Leave Ordinance: Outcomes for Employers and Employees* (p. 9). Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved 25 February 2011, from <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/family-leave-paid-sick-days/#publications>

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 11.

²¹ Petro, J. (2010, October). *Paid Sick Leave Does Not Harm Business Growth or Job Growth* (pp. 5-6). Drum Major Institute for Public Policy Publication. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from http://www.drummajorinstitute.org/pdfs/Paid_Sick_Leave_Does_Not_Harm.pdf

²² *Ibid*, p. 7.

²³ See note 19, p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 22.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 9.