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**Testimony of Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, Co-Founder and Executive Director of MomsRising**

**Before the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Labor and Employment Committee on**

**Senate Bill 913: AN ACT MANDATING EMPLOYERS PROVIDE PAID SICK LEAVE TO EMPLOYEES**

**MARCH 1, 2011**

On behalf of the nearly five thousand Connecticut members of MomsRising, I would like to thank you for holding this hearing on paid sick days and urge you to vote to support this important family-friendly legislation.

Since 2006, MomsRising has been working to bring together millions of people who share a common concern about the need to build a more family-friendly America. The right to earn paid sick days is an important step in that direction: With paid sick days, parents will not be forced to send sick children to school where they would likely infect classmates and teachers; workers with paid sick days would not spread illnesses to their coworkers and customers; and businesses would benefit from more productive employees, higher employee morale and reduced turnover costs. Paid sick days can also help contain the nation's health care costs because workers are able to go to the doctor for preventive and early detection and treatment.

Paid sick days are of enormous importance to mothers and all caregivers across the state. Since MomsRising's campaign for paid sick days began our members have contacted the Connecticut General Assembly thousands of times in support of this policy, many sharing their personal stories about how paid sick days, or a lack of paid sick days, have impacted them. A selection of those stories is below. I hope you will find the time to read them.

In fact, the passage of paid sick days policies are so important to parents, that MomsRising members are here today, in person, to testify. They took time out of their busy schedules, and found childcare for their children so that they could be here to share how important paid sick days are for their families and their communities.

Why are paid sick days so important to these women and others? Because paid sick days would help protect the health of our children and families and also provide real economic security to some of the most vulnerable working families. Outrageously, forty percent of all workers in Connecticut have no paid sick days. [1] And even worse, workers without paid sick days are concentrated in the service industry -- the people who cook and prepare our food, look after our children and care for the sick and elderly. When those workers have to work sick, it isn't healthy for any of us.

Providing paid sick days is also smart for business. Research shows that the costs of replacing workers, including advertising for, interviewing and training new employees often far outweighs the cost of offering paid sick days which contributes to employee retention. [2] Additionally, presenteeism, when workers come to work sick, costs the nationally economy about 180 billion a year in lost productivity versus absenteeism. [3]

There is overwhelming public support for paid sick days. The majority of both Republicans and Democrats support paid sick days. [4] When you think about it, it is hardly surprising. **We ALL get sick. When we're worried about our kids' health or our own health, we shouldn't also have to worry if we can pay the rent or if we'll still have a job when we get better.**

Please take a moment to read the stories from your community and from the front lines of motherhood across Connecticut—and do everything in your power to make sure that the paid sick days bill passes this year. Together, we can be a powerful voice for mothers and families. Thank you.

## **Select personal stories from Connecticut Mothers:**

I have been working for 2 1/2 years without being able to get paid for any sick time. I have 2 daughters and I'm on a weekly budget. If my daughters or I get sick then bills have to be put on the back burner. The stress alone is making me sick. Please help! We are all stress out enough in life. —**Michelle, East Haven, CT**

I have Lupus and Protein C Resistance, and my children have auto-immune disorders. When we get sick it's a large issue. Children who have parents that work, and can't keep them home when ill, put my children at risk. Please help them and us by paying for sick days. --**Kimberly, Trumbull, CT**

I am fortunate to have sick time accrual, but I work next to people who don't. When they are ill, not only do they get everyone else sick, but they're understandably tired, medicated, and error prone. Half the time they should not have been driving, let alone sitting at a desk, unproductive, getting others sick. Also, while I have sick time, I get written up if I use it 5 times in one year- so if I go home at 4 pm with a migraine, that's one occurrence, or if I leave to pick up a sick child- that's an occurrence. Even if I use less than 2 days of time in one year, I can still get written up - punished for having a child and trying to responsibly balance work and home. If I go home with a migraine at 4 pm, I might as well take all 3 days that I can use without a doctor's note, except I'm not that kind of person. We not only need paid sick time, but we need to be able to use it freely. This would probably lead to fewer "mental health" days. —**Victoria, Canton, CT**

Employers expect a good job from their employees and employees should be able to expect a good job from their employers. One important factor in any good job is flexibility for family-life. No parent should be forced to choose between their child or other immediate family member and their income. All working individuals should be afforded this benefit regardless of the size of the company. Seven earned sick days should be the minimum, with incentives for companies who are willing to provide a greater benefit. —

**Carly, Stafford Springs, CT**

If you go to work SICK you spread germs. It is COMMON sense to stay at home. It will pay off for ALL concerned in long run. —**Lois, Hamden, CT**

I need more paid sick days because as a single mom of two children, I struggle to make ends meet. I work in child care and my two young children receive care at the same center. I only receive 3 paid sick days yearly. Between three people, that is not nearly enough. When I am forced to be out for a week or more, I miss out on a lot of pay. The times this has happened, I have been forced to choose between not paying my whole rent or not having enough food. Please modify the current policy on paid sick days! Families everywhere need this help. — **Hope, CT**

I work part-time for the Connecticut Community Colleges. I have no paid sick days. In fact, if I cannot teach my class because of illness, there is no legal mechanism, other than a barter agreement with another part-timer or a full-time faculty member willing and able to cover, for me to cover my class AND get paid. Certainly the State of Connecticut should have paid sick days for its own workers. Often, our students have young children at home and if I'm sick, it could result in a cascade of illness. But I have come in ill more times than I can remember because I'm not otherwise paid and my classes are not otherwise covered. —**Myrna, Harwinton, CT**

I'm not sure of the number of single parent families but I'm sure it's high. Paid sick days are especially critical for this situation. If there are no paid sick days, the threat of losing that sole income is evident; managers are trained on how to induce stress on employees or finding other reasons to let them go, in a sense of nit picking! I have paid sick days but am speaking up for people that don't! It also helps to keep community and schools healthier the domino effect of keeping health cost down by not spreading illnesses. All around it's a win situation. Some parents are allowed to opt out of certain vaccines for children based on religion, this may bring back some serious disease outbreaks that will absolutely need to be controlled by staying home or quarantine, I certainly don't want to be exposed and would have no issue with telling someone to go home and stay home! It's protection for everyone! —**Amy, Terryville, CT**

We are an extremely vulnerable family. My husband does not get sick days. He goes to work sick and can get other families sick by doing so, but we won't be able to eat or pay our rent if we miss the pay from a missed day of work. It's not like we can just draw the missed day's pay or savings. We don't have any. —**Lauren, Guilford, CT**

I'm lucky I get paid sick days from my employer, but what about the parents in my child's class? This is the kind of regulation that separates us from what we used to call "third world" countries. Let's not drop the ball. - **Clarisa, Milford, CT**

We are a one-income working family with a daughter in college. If my spouse is sick we have to use vacation time or receive no pay. —**Georgia, Norwich, CT**

As a Grandma who is a frequent sick child caregiver, I'd like to add to the list compassion for the misery of sick, unhappy little kids who have no Grandma care available, and who have to soldier on, along with their Moms. —**Ruthie, Bloomfield, CT**

My husband works for a retail store, and has no sick days. Every dollar he makes is important to our income—he should not have to go to work sick just so we don't have to worry about making our mortgage that month! I am also a teacher, and because of the subject area I teach (music), my students simply lose instruction if I have to take off because my own children are sick. —**Karla, Cromwell, CT**

I am a woman in my fifties who is disabled but have a part time job and not only do I receive no paid sick days, if I am sick one day I need a doctor's note to "prove" I am sick enough not to go to work. I make \$80 per wk to try and feel like I contribute SOMETHING to my family (I have MS) and some nights I have to drag myself to my work being a companion to an elderly lady in her home. I think it's unfair that businesses do not have to provide sick days to their employees especially the young mothers with children, who must work even if their children are sick and daycare won't take their sick children. What happens to them? Does Connecticut care? —**Janice, New London, CT**

Paid sick and personal days have helped me tremendously. I'm a high school teacher who gets 15 sick and 6 personal days a year. When my youngest was diagnosed at age 3 with a chromosomal disorder, my school district allowed me to take the remaining semester off and return part-time 2nd semester; I have had a part-time teaching load at the same high school for 3 years now. With 3 young boys and a husband who is a social worker, we are a germ factory. In addition, my youngest must see over a dozen specialists on a regular basis and I have my own chronic asthma and allergy problems that predispose me to various complications. My principal, superintendent and coworkers have been incredibly supportive. In addition, no one has questioned me, said or done anything to make me feel guilty. In fact, they have had only encouraging words to relieve my working-mom guilt and have gone above and beyond to assist me during frequent and/or prolonged absences that are truly out of my control. Not only have I been blessed with the paid leave time I need, but also the support of administrators and coworkers who understand the demands and priorities and guilt of working parents. I still think all women should get 6 months of paid leave after having or adopting a baby, but until that time, I wish everyone could benefit from a situation similar to mine. – **MomsRising Member, CT**

I have raised six children while working full time. However, I had resources that many of the families

I served did not have. Sick days with pay are necessary. —**Shulamith, New Haven, CT**

Providing parents with paid sick days makes sense for so many reasons, not the least of which is stopping sick people from exposing others to illness. Sick children must also attend daycare if their parents cannot stay home with them, thus creating a cycle of more sick children. —**Elizabeth, Higganum, CT**

Please help us combat folks in the CT Workforce who really should be home nursing their flu symptoms, instead of having to serve us at our local Coffee Shop, Dept Store, Convenience Store or

Fast Food counters while sick. Show your support for paid sick time. —**Terry, Hartford, CT**

I work for a hospital and we have "PTO" days that cover everything from sick to paid time off/vacation days. It's all in one bank. I have had issues in the past that because of time off due to my children being sick, I have ended up in final warning. I never agreed with it, but I always felt that there is nothing I can do to change the policies here. After all, they are the policies! To me, it's not fair. I love my work and love my kids and of course my family comes first. I never want to give the impression that my work is not important, but sometimes when I get called in to my boss' office, I feel as though he thinks that. In reality, there is nothing I can do when my kids are sick but to stay home and take care of them. I, unlike many others, do not have my mother here to help me with my kids and I never have. Besides that, no one wants to care for someone's sick child. What can a working mother do? — **Evelyn, CT**

Dear Legislator, As a Pediatrician at CT Childrens' Medical Center, a Connecticut resident and MomsRising member, I urge you to support paid sick days this session. Sincerely, —**Kathie, South Glastonbury, CT**

Please, do the right thing. If we want healthy communities, passing a paid sick days bill is a no brainer. Our democracy is about we, the people. Not we, some of the people lucky enough to have caring management. So please, use your power for good! —**Brook, Danbury, CT**

I am a divorced mother of three children. Sick time is a VERY important aspect of my life! Not only have I had a few surgeries myself in the past couple of years that I used my accrued sick time for, but my daughter had a baby by cesarean section and needed some support at the very same time my own mother was in the hospital and I was her only emotional and financial support person! Without sick time I would have literally lost my mind! Working full time and running every evening to feed my mom who was paralyzed by a fall and who laid there waiting for me all day to visit and spend time with her. PLEASE consider all the responsibilities we have and please support sick time for everyone who is already as STRESSED out as they can be. Thank you. — **MomsRising Member, CT**

I am a single mother with no child care for sick children. I have to make elaborate arrangements if either of my 2 daughters stays home from school. – **MomsRising Member, CT**