



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of Domestic Social Development

PAID SICK LEAVE February 2009

ISSUE

Many workers do not have paid sick leave to care for themselves or their families when they are ill. With the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act over ten years ago, most full-time workers have up to twelve weeks a year of a combination of unpaid family leave for the birth or adoption of a child; or unpaid medical leave, such as an employee's own serious illness, or that of a child, spouse, or parent.

Many full-time workers have paid leave they can use to take time off from work when they or their families are ill. But not all workers have this essential benefit. Almost half (48 percent) of full-time, private-sector workers have no paid sick days, and 76 percent of low-wage workers have no paid sick leave. An Urban Institute study reports that 41 percent of working parents with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line have no paid leave of any kind (no paid sick leave, no paid vacation, or no paid personal days).

The costs of losing an employee (recruiting, interviewing, and training a replacement) can be far greater than the cost of providing short-term leave to retain existing employees. A minimum amount of paid sick leave can help level the playing field for employers, and will have no real impact on companies that already provide paid sick leave.

BACKGROUND

The Healthy Families Act of 2007 introduced in the 110th Congress would have required all employers with at least 15 or more employees to provide seven days of paid sick leave annually for full-time employees. Sick days could be used to meet an employee's own medical needs, or to allow an employee to care for the medical needs of a family member. Advocates anticipate that similar legislation will be introduced in the 111th Congress. Sponsors are expected to add a domestic violence provision to the new bill that would allow workers to use paid sick time to recover from or seek assistance related to an incidence of domestic violence, stalking, or sexual assault. According to the General Accounting Office, 25 to 50 percent of domestic violence victims report losing a job due at least in part to domestic violence.

USCCB POSITION

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) supported the Healthy Families Act of 2007 as an important affirmation of human dignity and family life. The Chairman of the formerly-named Domestic Policy Committee (now the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development) wrote in his letter to members in the House and Senate in May 2007, "It is our deep conviction that workers should not have to risk their livelihood to care for a newborn baby, a newly adopted child, or one that is seriously ill; nor should one's paycheck be in jeopardy because a worker is seriously ill, or a parent or spouse needs care."

The USSCB supports the Healthy Families Act as a reasonable extension of our efforts to promote family-friendly workplace policies found in *Putting Children and Families First*. Public policy should protect people who have to take time away from their jobs to handle serious family responsibilities. Parents should not have to worry about being penalized for taking care of themselves, a sick child, spouse, or parent. Such legislation would not only help family life but would send a message that children and families are high priorities within our society.

ACTION

Urge Members of Congress to support the Healthy Families Act and to co-sponsor the bill upon introduction.

Watch the USSCB/JPHD Web site (usccb.org/jphd) and Action Alert e-mails on paid sick leave activity in the 111th Congress.

For more information:

Contact Thom Shellabarger, USSCB, 202-541-3189, tshellabarger@usccb.org