

Paid Sick Days Protect the Economic Security of Working Families

FACT SHEET

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During the national economic downturn, millions of working families in the United States are facing financial crises of their own. Family budgets are stretched so thin that having to take just one day — or even half of a day — away from work without pay to recover from the flu or to care for a sick child can cause significant economic strain. For more than 40 percent of private-sector workers — and more than 80 percent of low-wage workers — who have no paid sick days, this can mean job loss and financial devastation.¹ **A minimum paid sick days standard would help to protect millions of working families from falling further into financial crisis during these tough economic times.**

Working Families in Crisis

The 2007-2010 economic crisis has left millions of working families on the brink of financial disaster. The recession has had deep and lasting effects that underscore the need to prevent further devastation:

- **Millions of families that once relied on two incomes are forced to survive on one — or none at all.** Nearly ten percent of the workforce is unemployed, and many more are underemployed.² A sharp rise in male unemployment has increased the number of families entirely dependent on a woman's earnings. Two million more women are now the sole breadwinners for their families.³ But many jobs in traditionally female fields like nursing, retail services, child care, office administration and food service⁴ are the very jobs that offer low pay, few benefits and no workplace protections like paid sick days that would ease the burden on working families. Single women who support families are hit especially hard. Their unemployment rate has jumped to 13 percent — the highest in more than 25 years — leaving these families with no wages to depend on.⁵
- **Family budgets are so tight that workers can no longer pay bills or meet basic needs.** By the third quarter of 2009, credit card defaults rose to 10.5 percent of all credit card debt — an increase of 143.2 percent from the fourth quarter of 2007,⁶ and the highest rate in 20 years.⁷ And many homeowners are losing their most significant asset—their home. More than 9 percent of mortgages in 2010 are delinquent and 4.4 percent are in foreclosure.⁸ Personal bankruptcies reached a record of 1.5 million filings in 2010.⁹ The undeniable strain on families has left an increasing number of them struggling to stay afloat. Further job loss would be devastating.
- **Families are cutting back on important health care needs to save money.** In one recent study, half of Americans (53 percent) said they had cut back on medical care in the past 12 months because of cost concerns. More than one-third relied on home remedies and over-the-counter drugs rather than visiting a doctor, 34 percent skipped dental care, 27 percent postponed getting necessary health care, and 21 percent did not fill prescriptions for medicines they need.¹⁰ When faced with financial challenges, too many working families are forced to put other expenses before their health needs.

With so many families just barely hanging on, a policy that preserves workers' job security during times of ill health is sorely needed. In an environment where the majority of Americans say they are living paycheck to paycheck and the average unemployed worker searches for more than six months for a new job, no one should have to lose pay or risk losing their job to deal with a common illness or seek routine medical care.

Paid Sick Days are an Easy Step Toward Preventing Further Financial Devastation

As we have seen in this recession, when the national economy suffers, families face significant financial challenges and pressures — making measures that protect their health and prevent unnecessary job loss more important than ever. Paid sick days allow workers to deal with unexpected illness and family emergencies without reducing their income or, even worse, losing their jobs altogether. **Establishing a paid sick days standard is an easy, achievable way to protect families' economic security when they need it most.**

The federal Healthy Families Act would set this important paid sick days standard at the national level. For businesses with 15 or more employees, the bill would enable workers to earn up to seven paid sick days per year to deal with personal and family illness. Under the bill, 90 percent of workers would have access to paid sick days.¹¹

States are leading the way. In June 2011, Connecticut became the first state to pass a law guaranteeing some workers paid sick days, and about 20 other states and localities across the country have introduced paid sick days bills or have active campaigns in 2011. Support and momentum are building. Learn more at www.paid sick days.org.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, March). *Employee Benefits in the United States: Selected paid leave benefits: Access, National Compensation Survey (Table 6)*. Retrieved 9 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>. Includes tenure adjustment made in: Williams, C., et al. (2011, January). *44 Million U.S. Workers Lacked Paid Sick Days in 2010: 77 Percent of Food Service Workers Lacked Access*. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 2 June 2011, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/44-million-u.s.-workers-lacked-paid-sick-days-in-2010-77-percent-of-food-service-workers-lacked-access>

² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, December 3). *Employment Situation Summary: The Employment Situation—November 2010*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

³ Boushey, H. (2009). *The New Breadwinners*, as cited in Maria Shriver *A Women's Nation Changes Everything*. Retrieved 15 December 2010 at <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/10/pdf/awn/chapters/economy.pdf>

⁴ U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2009). *20 Leading Occupations of Women: 2009 Annual Averages*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/20lead2009.htm>

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, November). *Employment Situation Summary: Household data, seasonally adjusted (Table A)*. Retrieved 14 December 2010, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.a.htm>

⁶ Weller, C. (2010, December 13). *Economic Snapshot for December 2010*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved 14 December 2010, from <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/12/snapshot1210.html>

⁷ Goldstein, M. (2009, March 16). U.S. Credit Card Defaults Rise to 20-Year High. *Reuters*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from www.reuters.com/article/hotStocksNews/idUSTRE52F75620090316

⁸ See note 6.

⁹ National Bankruptcy Research Center. (2010, January 6). *National Bankruptcy Research Center December 2009 Bankruptcy Filings Report*. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from http://www.nbkrc.com/December2009_News.aspx

¹⁰ Kaiser Family Foundation. (2009, March). *Health Care Costs: A Primer: Key Information on Health Care Costs and Their Impact*. Kaiser Family Foundation Publication. Retrieved 13 December 2010, from www.kff.org/insurance/upload/7670_02.pdf

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*. Available at http://jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=abf8aca7-6b94-4152-b720-2d8d04b81ed6

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 women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at www.nationalpartnership.org.