

Paid Sick Days for All: Healthy Workers, Healthy Businesses, Healthy District

The problem: In 2008, Washington, D.C. passed a groundbreaking law allowing workers to earn up to a minimum number of paid sick days each year, but last minute amendments weakened the law. Five years later, workers in certain occupations remain without paid sick days entirely, while limits on eligibility and weak enforcement provisions keep thousands of others from taking needed sick time. It's time for a change.

The solution: The Earned Sick and Safe Leave Amendment Act will make paid sick days a reality for the workers who need them most. It will cover tipped restaurant workers, who are currently excluded; allow workers to start accruing leave earlier; and strengthen remedies for workers and penalties for businesses who violate the law. Ensuring that D.C. workers are able to take the time they need to recover from illness, care for a sick family member, or deal with domestic violence will improve the health of D.C.'s workers, businesses, and residents.

Why Paid Sick Days for All?

Healthy Workers: Too many workers, especially restaurant servers and bartenders, still have to work when they are sick.

- 80% of restaurant workers in D.C. do not get paid sick days.¹ So it's no surprise that *59% of D.C. restaurant workers reported that they have prepared, cooked, or served food while sick.*²
- In other industries, workers report that they still don't earn paid sick days despite the law – either because they haven't been employed for long enough or because their employer is simply not complying. This means that thousands of workers in the District each year have to choose between staying home to recover from an illness and being able to pay their bills.

Healthy Businesses: High-road businesses know that paid sick days promote productivity and cost savings.

- Employees who work sick endanger business profits by putting the health and productivity of other workers – as well as customers and the public – at risk. Adults without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely than adults with paid sick days to report going to work with a contagious illness like the flu or a viral infection.³

¹ Restaurant Opportunities Center of Washington, DC. *Behind the Kitchen Door: Inequality and Opportunity in Washington, DC's Thriving Restaurant Industry*. Retrieved 2 February 2012, from <http://rocunited.org/blog/roc-dc-behind-the-kitchen-door>.

² Ibid.

³ Smith, T., & Kim, J. (2010, June). *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences*. National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago publication. Retrieved 19 December 2011, from

- Paid sick days reduce operating costs for businesses. In addition to lowering the risk of diseases spreading, they lower the costs of “presenteeism” – when workers come to work sick and are less productive – and turnover, which is a huge concern for employers. Hiring and training a replacement for a low-wage worker can cost 30 percent of a worker’s annual salary.⁴

A Healthy District: Providing paid sick days promotes the economic security of D.C.’s working families.

- In today’s tough economy, it is more challenging than ever for D.C.’s families to get by. For families without paid sick days, getting ill can spell disaster. Missing even a few days of work without pay can prevent workers from being able to pay bills or meet basic needs. A recent study shows that just 3.5 days of lost pay are equivalent to the entire monthly grocery budget of an average family without paid sick days.⁵
- Without adequate legal protections, workers can lose their jobs just for taking time off when they are sick. Nationwide, nearly one in four adults reports losing a job or being threatened with job loss for taking time off of work to deal with a personal or family illness.⁶

Now is the right time to update the law.

For more information on the Paid Sick Days for All campaign contact
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<http://www.publicwelfare.org/resources/DocFiles/psd2010final.pdf>.

⁴ Williams, J., & Huang, P. (2011). *Improving Work-Life Fit in Hourly Jobs*. Work Life Law, U. C. Hastings College of Law publication. Retrieved January 26 2011, from <http://www.worklifelaw.org/pubs/ImprovingWork-LifeFit.pdf>

⁵ Gould, E., Filion, K., & Green, A. (2011, 29 June). *The Need for Paid Sick Days: The lack of a federal policy further erodes family economic security*. Economic Policy Institute publication. Retrieved 12 August 2011, from <http://www.epi.org/page/-/BriefingPaper319.pdf?nocdn=1>.

⁶ See note 3.