

SICK AND FIRED.



WHY WE NEED EARNED SICK
DAYS TO BOOST THE ECONOMY



Family Values @ Work is a national network of state and city coalitions organizing on issues such as earned sick time and affordable family and medical leave. Each coalition brings together dozens of diverse groups who understand that everyone benefits when no worker is forced to choose between their job and their health or the health of a loved one.

1. Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi, *The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle-Class Mothers and Fathers Are Going Broke* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). 2. American Sustainable Business Council et al, "Opinion Survey: Small Business Owners' Opinions on Regulations and Job Creation," February 1, 2012 http://asbcouncil.org/sites/default/files/files/Regulations_Poll_Report_FINAL.pdf. 3. Tom Smith and Dr. Tom W. Smith and Jibum Kim at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, June 2010, <http://www.publicwelfare.org/resources/DocFiles/psd2010final.pdf>.

NO ONE SHOULD WIND UP OUT OF WORK BECAUSE OF BEING A GOOD PARENT OR FOLLOWING DOCTOR'S ORDERS.

In this tough economy, where finding a new job can take months or even years, lacking access to policies like earned sick days can wreak havoc on a family's stability and turn a routine illness into an economic crisis.

In 2001, 25 percent of dual-income couples and 13 percent of single-parent families who filed for bankruptcy did so after having to miss two or more weeks of work due to their own illness or that of a family member.¹

These job losses hurt all of us. Workers are also consumers, who need income to spend in order to boost the performance of small businesses.²

Meet some of the workers who are among the sick and fired – and who are today helping to lead the fight to win earned sick days, so that others will no longer have to face this threat to their family's economic security.

Ai, age 22, is the sole financial support and primary caretaker for her younger brother and sister. For several years, Ai had been waiting tables for \$4.65 an hour. To make ends meet, she often picked up extra shifts. Over time, the extra work took a physical toll; she sustained a back injury and her knees began to wear down.

Without paid sick days, Ai said she ignored these injuries. Like 90% of restaurant workers in NYC, she didn't receive a single paid sick day and couldn't afford to take time off. "I could go to the doctor to check out my back, or I could have dinner for my brother and sister. That was the choice I had to make, and I chose them."

When Ai's little brother needed care, she also chose to take care of him and asked her boss for a day off.

"If you don't come in today, don't bother coming back," her boss told her.

"I had to prioritize my family over work, and I lost my job," says Ai.

"If restaurants allowed their workers to earn paid sick time, I would have kept my job while taking care of my brother."



AI ELO
NEW YORK CITY

Eudocio used to work at a bar and restaurant in Manhattan. To support his family, he worked overnight from 1 a.m. to 10 a.m., six days a week, cleaning and maintaining the restaurant. While taking the trash out one night, Eudocio slipped and injured his foot. Even though it was inflamed and very painful, Eudocio didn't go to the doctor because he couldn't afford to miss a shift. Three days later, after continuing to work with his injury, Eudocio went to the emergency room and was admitted to the hospital. He needed emergency surgery which left him unable to walk; the doctors told him to stay in bed until his torn tendon healed.

A few days after his surgery, Eudocio's boss called and said he had to come back to work. "I explained to my boss that my doctor told me not to put weight on my foot, but he said that if I couldn't go back to work right away, I would lose my job." For following doctor's orders, Eudocio was fired.

Recovering from his surgery and unemployed, it wasn't easy for Eudocio to find a new job. He had to borrow money just to pay the rent and buy food. By the time he found a new job, Eudocio had more than \$3,000 in debt. At restaurant wages, it will take his family a long time to pay that off, preventing them from saving for their children's education as they were planning. "It may not sound like much," Eudocio said, "but for workers like me, a few paid sick days could have made all the difference



EUDOCIO ALVARADO
NEW YORK CITY

Felix Trinidad, a father of two, worked at Golden Farm Grocery in Kensington, Brooklyn for twelve years. At only 34 years old, Felix died of stomach cancer.

Felix had been enduring severe pain for nearly a year, but he kept working because he feared that taking a sick day to go to the doctor would cost him his job.

Unable to bear the pain any longer, Felix finally went to the hospital and was diagnosed with cancer. His boss deducted four hours from his paycheck for the time he was at the emergency room.

After being diagnosed, Félix kept working—even through chemotherapy treatments—because he was afraid of being fired. Paid sick days would have enabled Felix to seek medical treatment when his symptoms started instead of waiting until it was too late.

“I feel lonely, and the children miss him,” said Anastasia González, Felix’s widow. “He was a good man. He felt he had to work for his family even when he was sick because we were barely getting by with a full paycheck.”



FÉLIX TRINIDAD
NEW YORK CITY
DECEASED

Elose Arestil lives with her teenaged son in Miami. With the earnings from her job as a dishwasher at the Capitol Grille in Miami, she also helped support family members back home in Haiti.

During her year and a half at the restaurant, Elose “wasn’t very happy because I was doing the job of two or more people. I usually worked for four hours or more, but the chef would clock me out earlier than I finished. I kept the place clean and threw the trash out, but the management never saw me as an employee; no matter what I did, they never respected me as a person.”

After sustaining an injury on the job, Elose went to a health clinic. “I went back to work and gave my boss the papers that said I had hurt my hand doing the job, and I went to the hospital to get care,” she said. “Without even asking me how I was, my boss told me that I no longer had my job at the restaurant. I was in shock. Getting fired was devastating.”

Elose filed for unemployment while she looked for another job, but received only one check for \$173. When she asked why, she was told that her boss maintained she had voluntarily quit. “The way I was let [go] was not right,” Elose said. “As people, I had respect for them, and they should give the same respect to me.”



ELOSE ARESTIL
MIAMI, FLORIDA

Anjeannette is the mother of three boys and has worked in construction for nearly two years. Before that she worked in telecommunications, restaurants, transit and child care. She has never had a single paid sick day. This year she sprained her ankle badly and couldn't go to work for a week.

"I don't have any paid sick days," Anjeannette said, "so I lost a whole week's pay which meant I wasn't able to pay all my bills and wasn't able to pay for gas. It took a month for me to catch up."

Anjeannette also had to go back to work before her ankle was healed, because she just couldn't afford to take any more time without pay.

"After a few hours of working each day, my ankle was really swollen and painful," she said. "I had to untie my boots because of the swelling -- and then I got in trouble with my boss for untying my boots!"

"Paid sick days would have made a big difference to me in this situation."



ANJEANNETTE BROWN
CONSTRUCTION WORKER
PORTLAND, OREGON

In 2004, Paul, a soldier just home from serving a year in Afghanistan, was fired when he became ill after working a nine hour shift at a profitable chain restaurant in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania. At 1 a.m. Paul was running a fever of 103 and vomiting. Because he didn't want to endanger the guests at the restaurant, Paul left one hour before the end of his shift. His boss fired him.

The employer then challenged Paul's unemployment application. In their response to the agency, Paul says, they stated that he was "given a choice: either continue working while sick and remain employed, or leave and be terminated." Their contention was that by leaving, Paul "chose" to end his employment. The unemployment board ruled against the restaurant.

Paul was able to find a similar position at another restaurant, but with very limited hours. Because of the termination, this veteran had to delay his return to college for almost one year.



PAUL
DREXEL HILL,
PENNSYLVANIA

NEARLY ONE IN FOUR WORKERS



Nearly one in four workers in this country (23 percent) say they have lost a job or been threatened with losing a job because they took time off when they were sick or to care for a sick family member.³

For seven years, Patti Hughes was employed as a home health care nurse in Thornton, Colorado, working with people with disabilities or who were aging. Despite the fact that she was in close contact with clients who were often ill and contagious, Patti didn't earn paid sick days.

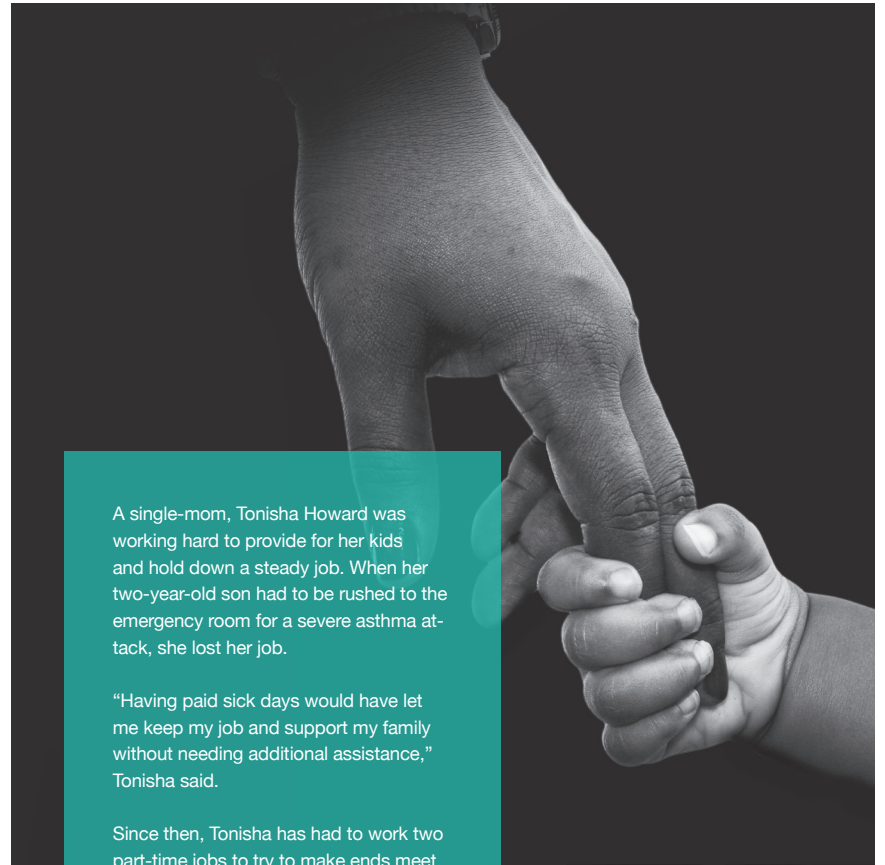
In 2011, Patti developed a severe case of pneumonia. She could barely breathe and had a temperature of 104 degrees. At the time, she was working with a patient who was quadriplegic and needed complete care—everything from lifting him, to washing him, and administering medications.

"I did not have the strength to get myself out of bed, let alone lift a 170-pound man, so I called out for three days," she said. "I felt terrible because I didn't know if they would find someone to care for my client while I was out, but the response was unbelievable. My case manager told me not to bother coming in again."

Sick and without a job, Patti faced an eviction and was unable to care for her two dogs. The man she was caring for was sent to a state-funded nursing home, a costly alternative to the quality care that she had been providing in his home.



PATTI HUGHES
FORMERLY IN COLORADO



A single-mom, Tonisha Howard was working hard to provide for her kids and hold down a steady job. When her two-year-old son had to be rushed to the emergency room for a severe asthma attack, she lost her job.

“Having paid sick days would have let me keep my job and support my family without needing additional assistance,” Tonisha said.

Since then, Tonisha has had to work two part-time jobs to try to make ends meet, but it hasn’t been enough. She and her kids were recently evicted.

TONISHA HOWARD
MILWAUKEE, WI

Stacey, a single mother, worked at a child care center, but couldn't rely on paid sick time when she or her son got sick.

During her lunch break, Stacey went to check on her son at the child care center in the same building. She found him sitting on the floor shivering with a temperature over 100 degrees.

"My boss said if I clocked out there was a chance I wouldn't ever clock in again," she said. Despite the threat, Calvin kept right on walking. "As a woman, I can't take care of somebody else's child if my child is there shaking and shivering on the floor."

When she returned to work, Stacey was suspended for a week without pay. As the only working adult in her household, Stacey was responsible for all of the bills including childcare, rent and transportation. "I had everything calculated," she said. She was unable to pay her bills without that week's pay.



STACEY CALVIN
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

In the restaurant business, "It's pretty much you don't call in sick unless you're on your deathbed," said Megan, a 23-year-old server Seattle restaurant. About three years ago, she was fired from her server position at a Tacoma restaurant, where she had worked for over two years. One evening, she called her boss to say was sick and couldn't come to work, but her supervisor told her that they were busy and needed her to come in.

"I was sneezing and coughing; some of the tables didn't want me to serve them." Customers called the public health department and complained. The supervisor called Megan to his office and accused her of calling the public health department, an accusation that Megan denied. "I was on the floor the entire time. I didn't call the public health [department]. I told him, 'you are questioning my integrity.'"

With no health insurance, Megan stated, "There are times I don't go and see the doctor because I can't afford it. It's not just paid sick days. If I am sick today, and I go to the doctor the next day, I miss two days of work. I can't afford it. I am worried about how am I going to put gas in my car to get to work."



MEGAN SACKS
TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Shyrone Richardson moved from North Carolina to New Jersey in hopes of finding a job that he could keep – even when he got sick for a few days.

For years, Sharon worked at an automobile manufacturer in North Carolina when he became ill and had to be hospitalized. He used his three personal days and since his illness had not improved, he was unable to return to work immediately.

“One of my last days in the hospital, my doctor himself said he didn’t want to release me but I was being threatened by my employer that if I didn’t get there at a certain time that I would lose my job. For anyone that has been in a situation like that, it’s a very hard one to make—take care of your family or take care of your health.”

Shyrone’s doctor called his boss, but Shyrone was fired. He was forced to go on unemployment and struggled to make ends meet for some time.

“Everyone gets sick,” said Pastor Richardson. “And everybody’s got to work. It doesn’t make sense that people are getting fired for getting sick.”



**PASTOR
SHYRONE RICHARDSON
NEW JERSEY**



Campaigns for earned sick time are
growing all around the country. Join us!
Contact: info@familyvaluesatwork.org