

# EARNED SICK DAYS STRENGTHEN FAMILIES AND OUR ECONOMY



**An Urgently-Needed Policy that Reduces  
Unemployment, Improves Business  
Productivity and Helps Families Become  
More Financially Secure**



**17 state coalitions working for paid sick days, family leave insurance and other policies that value families at work.**

## Earned Sick Days Help Families

In these tough economic times, Americans are working hard just to keep up. Few can afford to take time off, and many are forced to go to work even when they're sick rather than risk losing their job or wages. Two out of five private sector workers, and four out of five low-wage workers, do not earn paid sick days. The loss of a few days' pay for the lowest income workers can equal a month's worth of groceries, according to the Economic Policy Institute. Nearly one-quarter of workers say they have lost a job or been threatened with job loss for taking time off because they or a family member was ill, including 16 percent who say they were fired for this reason.

Lack of earned sick days is a particular challenge for working mothers, nearly half of whom say they miss work when a child gets sick. One-third of middle- and upper-income mothers and two-thirds of low-income mothers report lost pay to care for an ill child. As more men take on caregiving responsibilities, they, too, experience a financial hit.

### **Spotlight:** Marianne Bullock, home health care worker, Greenfield, Massachusetts

In her seven months as a home health care worker for a large Massachusetts agency, Marianne Bullock never missed a day of work. But when her daughter Sora, then 18 months old, contracted a stomach virus, Bullock called her supervisor to say she needed to stay home. "I told her I expected to be back in 24 hours, but the next day Sora wasn't taking any fluids so I asked for another day off," recalls Bullock, who did not receive any paid sick time. On the third day, her daughter seemed better but as Bullock headed out to work, the little girl threw up. "When I called work that time I was told not to bother coming in. I was fired."

The loss of her paycheck pushed Bullock and her husband Thom, a carpenter, deeper into poverty. "I begged them to let me work two more weeks so I could at least pay for the day care we had already committed to," recalls Bullock. But she was the only parent working in the department at the time and her manager was unsympathetic. "There was nothing I could do," says Bullock, whose family struggled for several months to cover basic needs before she found another health care job.



## Earned Sick Days are Good for Business

Many business owners know and research confirms that allowing workers to earn paid sick days helps businesses keep the workplace healthier, reduces turnover and improves productivity.

Across the country, small business owners who offer earned paid sick days report little or no additional costs resulting from the policy. The chief benefit, they say, is that the policy helps retain employees and keep recruitment costs down—two critical factors for staying competitive in a tough economy. Studies show that the costs of replacing workers who leave jobs can range from 25 to 200 percent of the employee's total compensation, depending on the position.

Government data and research find that workers do not abuse sick day policies. In San Francisco, where full-time workers annually accrue five or nine paid sick days depending on company size, 25 percent take no sick time and workers use an average of three sick days a year. Large government studies have produced similar findings. A survey released in 2012 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that workers missed an average of 3.8 days a year due to illness.

### **Spotlight:** Tony Fuentes, owner of Milagros Boutique, Portland, Oregon

When Tony Fuentes and his wife opened their baby and maternity supplies store in 2004, they set out to create a family-friendly business. That included allowing employees to earn two weeks off starting their first year for sick days, vacations and personal days. "When people come to work we don't want them to be sick and spreading illnesses among the staff or worrying all day about a child who is sick at home," said Fuentes.

Fuentes believes the policy, which also allows employees to accumulate unused leave for future use, has had a "tremendous impact" on the business' growth and stability, including minimal employee turnover. "We have employees who have been with us for over five years, which means expenses for hiring and training new workers are extremely low," says Fuentes. "I attribute that in large part to our family-friendly policies."



## Earned Sick Days Boost the Economy

If an employee is fired for taking time off to recover from an illness or care for a sick family member, she is likely to stay unemployed for many months or end up in a lower paying job. This hurts families and our economy. When people don't have jobs or are forced to take lower-paying positions, they can't afford the goods and services that drive economic growth. "Paid sick days help hard-working people remain employed and contributing to our economy," says Eileen Appelbaum, senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Lack of access to paid sick days also drives up health care costs. When workers come to jobs sick, they spread their illness, costing the economy \$160 billion annually in lost productivity and \$1 billion in medical expenses—including \$500 million in health care expenses paid by tax dollars. Workers without paid sick days are twice as likely to go to the emergency room when they fall ill because they can't take time off for doctor appointments.

### **Spotlight:** Michelle Lin, MD, Bellevue Hospital Center, New York City

Every day Michelle Lin, a physician at Bellevue Hospital, sees patients in the emergency room "with illnesses that could have been prevented by not working when they were sick." Just recently, a child was rushed to the hospital with a serious asthma attack.

"She needed several breathing treatments and was ultimately admitted to the intensive care unit," recalls Dr. Lin. "She might have stopped breathing if she had waited any longer. Her asthma had been getting worse for days, but her mother was unable to miss work for a routine pediatrician's visit—a simple intervention that could have prevented her potentially devastating attack."

Dr. Lin is among a growing group of doctors who are speaking out for earned sick day legislation. "No one should skip getting medical attention for themselves or a child because they can't afford to miss pay or risk getting fired," she says.



## Earned Sick Days: The Facts

Allowing workers to earn paid sick days is a critical cost-saving policy that helps families, businesses and the economy. With paid sick days workers aren't forced to choose between being a responsible employee and a responsible family member.

### What is an Earned Sick Day?

Earned sick days help ensure workers can afford to stay home to take care of themselves or family members when they're sick or need to see the doctor. Without the fear of losing pay or their job, workers are more likely to keep sickness out of the workplace so that businesses can stay productive.

### Don't Most Workers Earn Paid Sick Days?

Nearly 44 million people – or 42 percent of all U.S. workers – do not get a single day off to take care of themselves or a family member when they are sick. Even more people – nearly half of those with paid sick days – can't use the time to care for a sick child.

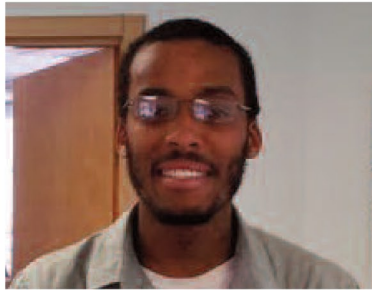
### Who Has and Who Does Not Have Earned Sick Days?

Low-wage workers and women, who bear a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities, are least likely to be able to earn paid sick days. Many of the workers without earned sick days are in jobs such as food service, childcare, eldercare and retail work that place them in direct contact with the public. Seventy-seven percent of food service workers and 62 percent of child and elder care workers have no paid sick days.

### Spotlight: "Sam"\* professional cook, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sam was working as a cook for a Philadelphia caterer when he came down with a severe stomach ailment. "I knew standing in a kitchen preparing meals all day wasn't an option," recalls Sam, who asked for a day off even though his employer did not provide paid sick days. When his symptoms worsened and he had to take another sick day, his boss "questioned my work ethic." Sam, who was eventually diagnosed with an inflammatory bowel disease, grew sicker and weaker. But when he asked for a third day off, his boss fired him. "I felt like I had no recourse. If I had paid sick days I would have been able to take time off to heal. But the stress of going to work despite my illness only made me sicker and less productive."

\* the name was changed to help protect the worker's job



## Earned Sick Days Make Sense

Few public policies today have the broad, bipartisan support of earned sick days. Nationally, three out of four Americans (75 percent) favor guaranteeing workers the right to earn a minimum number of paid sick days, including 90 percent of Democrats, 75 percent of independents and nearly 60 percent of Republicans.

Allowing workers to earn a minimum number of paid sick days is a common sense measure that will create job security for our families, help rebuild an American economy that values hard work, and protect our health and safety.

Add your voice. Help ensure that American workers no longer have to sacrifice their health or risk losing their jobs when they get sick.

### You can start spreading the word today:

- Speak out about the importance of earned sick days
- Write a letter to the editor or op-ed for your local newspaper
- Call your local legislator or Member of Congress
- Post information on Facebook or Twitter
- Work with local coalitions trying to pass earned paid sick day legislation

To learn about earned sick day campaigns in your area and other ways you can get involved, visit [www.familyvaluesatwork.org](http://www.familyvaluesatwork.org)

**"As both a State Senator and CEO of a company with 1,000 employees, I know that earned sick leave is a benefit that should be a right.**

**It makes for better businesses, healthier communities and offers support for hard-working people who have been hurt most by our tough economic times."**

– Massachusetts State Senator  
Dan Wolf, CEO of Cape Air

