

September 10, 2015

Senator Patty Murray
154 Russell Senate Office Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murray and Congresswoman DeLauro:

As leaders of public health and healthcare organizations dedicated to improving the health of all Americans, we are writing to commend you for introducing the Healthy Families Act (S. 497/H.R. 932), which would guarantee many workers the right to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year. Paid sick days are vital to the public's health because they reduce the spread of contagious illnesses and diseases and increase access to preventive care among workers and their families.

With flu season upon us, we are reminded that nearly 40 percent of private sector workers in the United States cannot earn a single paid sick day. When these workers get sick, they face the impossible choice of going to work and possibly infecting others and staying home and risking their jobs. Many workers who do have paid sick days cannot use them to care for a child, which means they often have to send a sick child to school or day care.

Employees who are sick and possibly contagious in the workplace enable the spread of illness among co-workers and customers alike, and the very industries and occupations that require frequent contact with the public are some of the least likely to provide paid sick days. In the restaurant industry, for example, 90 percent of workers lack paid sick days. This increases the chance of infectious diseases spreading through contact with food, co-workers and the general public – and it could threaten the productivity and safety of America's businesses.

Paid sick days also make good public health sense because they help to ensure workers can comply with science-based guidance on controlling the spread of an outbreak. According to a 2010 report, almost 26 million employed Americans age 18 and older may have been infected with the H1N1 influenza in 2009, and nearly eight million people took no time off work while infected.¹ Another recent study found that providing employees who have the flu with one or two days off could reduce workplace infections by up to 40 percent² while another estimates that seasonal flu results in \$18.9

¹ Drago, R. and Miller, K. "Sick at Work: Infected Employees in the Workplace During the H1N1 Pandemic." Institute for Women's Policy Research, February 2010. <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B284sick-atwork.pdf>

² Supriya Kumar, John J. Grefenstette, David Galloway, Steven M. Albert, and Donald S. Burke. [Policies to Reduce Influenza in the Workplace: Impact Assessments Using an Agent-Based Model](#). American Journal of Public Health: August 2013, Vol. 103, No. 8, pp. 1406-1411. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2013.301269

billion per year in indirect costs attributable to lost productivity.³

Paid sick days also improve access to preventive care by giving employees the ability to take time to go to the doctor and to ensure their children get routine check-ups and immunizations. A 2012 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report found that workers without paid sick time are less likely to get screened for cancer.⁴ There are clear signs that delaying or skipping necessary preventive care can result in poor health outcomes and more costly care for the more than 43 million American workers who lack paid sick days and their families.

The Healthy Families Act is a long overdue national workplace standard that would protect the health of America's workers, families, businesses and communities. We thank you for your leadership, and we look forward to working with you to help ensure the passage of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

American Public Health Association
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Child Care Aware of America
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)
Communications Workers of America
Employee Rights Center
First Focus Campaign for Children
Missouri Association of Local Public Health Agencies
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Council for Occupational Safety & Health
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
Public Justice Center
Rhode Island Committee for Occupational Health and Safety
RiverStone Health
Safe States Alliance
Society for Disaster Medicine and Public Health
Trust for America's Health
West Valley Neighborhoods Coalition
Worksafe

³ Mao et al, [Annual economic impacts of seasonal influenza on US counties: Spatial heterogeneity and patterns](#). International Journal of Health Geographics 2012, 11:16.

⁴ Peipins LA, Soman A, Berkowitz Z, White MC. [The lack of paid sick leave as a barrier to cancer screening and medical care-seeking: results from the National Health Interview Survey](#). [BMC Public Health](#) 2012;12(1):520.