



February 28, 2019

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the over 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I write to urge you to become an original cosponsor the Healthy Families Act. Today, millions of hard-working people, particularly women and low-income individuals, are forced to make the difficult decision between caring for their health and keeping their paycheck or job. The Healthy Families Act would establish a national paid sick days standard, ensuring workers have access to paid sick days to take time off from work to recover from an illness or to care for a sick child or family member. Paid sick days are vital to the economic security of women and families. I urge you to cosponsor the Healthy Families Act.

AAUW is committed to increasing the availability of and access to benefits and policies that promote work-life balance, which are critical to achieving economic self-sufficiency for all women.¹ Nearly 33 percent of private sector workers — and 70 percent of low-paid workers — have no paid sick days to care for their own health.² That translates to more than 34 million people working in the private sector who do not have access to paid sick days at all, and millions more who do not have paid sick time to use to care for a sick child or family member.³

Workers of color disproportionately do not have access to paid sick leave.⁴ And, for women, the problem is particularly difficult. Today, only 60 percent of working women have some access to paid sick days and nearly 40 percent of mothers say they are solely responsible for staying home from work with sick children, compared with only 3 percent of fathers.⁵ This means that workers often have to make tough decisions, including jeopardizing their employment in order to care for a sick family member. These decisions are very hard for low-paid workers, who overwhelmingly do not have access to paid sick leave and who are struggling to balance the demands of their health, the health of their families, and their economic security.⁶

For the average worker without access to paid sick days, the cost of taking unpaid sick time can put a painful dent in the monthly budget for the household. In fact, according to the Economic Policy Institute, missing a half day of work due to illness and the subsequent loss of wages is equivalent to the household's monthly spending for fruits and vegetables.⁷ Similarly, three days of unpaid sick time is approximately equivalent to a household's monthly utilities budget, which could prevent individuals from paying for electricity and heat.⁸ The lack of access to paid sick days directly affects workers, particularly working families, including their ability to meet the both health and financial responsibilities.

It's time for Congress to take action to address this critical need. The Healthy Families Act would ensure workers in businesses with 15 or more employees can earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year to be used to recover from their own illness, access preventive care, or provide care for a sick family member. The Healthy Families Act would also assist employees who are, or whose family members are, victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking, by providing the employees with paid time away from work to allow the victims to receive treatment and to take the necessary steps to ensure their protection.

Paid sick days are also good for workforce stability and business productivity. Retaining workers avoids the high costs of turnover, such as advertising, interviewing and training new hires.⁹ A comprehensive review found that the cost of turnover can range from 16 to 200 percent of an employee’s annual compensation.¹⁰ Further, when workers do come into work sick, they are significantly less productive. According to the National Partnership for Women & Families, the loss in productivity due to working while sick costs our economy \$218 billion a year.¹¹ Paid sick days help reduce these costs for employers. For these reasons, among others, AAUW urges you to support real policies workers and families need by cosponsoring the Healthy Families Act.

The need for such legislation is clear. AAUW believes that ensuring workers can take time off when they or a family member are sick is good for families, public health, and businesses’ bottom lines. I urge you to cosponsor the Healthy Families Act.

Cosponsorship and votes associated with this legislation may be scored in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record for the 116th Congress*. If you have any questions, please contact Anne Hedgepeth, Director of Federal Policy, at 202/785-7724.

Sincerely,



Deborah J. Vagins
Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Research

¹ AAUW, *Public Policy Priorities*, June 2017, <https://www.aauw.org/resource/principles-and-priorities/>.

² National Partnership for Women & Families, “Support Paid Sick Days: Quick Facts,” <http://www.paid sick days.org/research-resources/quick-facts.html>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Institute for Women’s Policy Research, *Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings*, February 2016, <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/B356.pdf>.

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employee Benefits in the United States – March 2018,” Table 5, July 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>.

⁷ Elise Gould and Jessica Schieder, “Work Sick or Lose Pay? The High Cost of Being Sick When You Don’t Get Paid Sick Days” (Economic Policy Institute, June 2017), <https://www.epi.org/publication/work-sick-or-lose-pay-the-high-cost-of-being-sick-when-you-dont-get-paid-sick-days/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Siegwath Meyer, C., Mukerjee, S., & Sestero, A. (2001, Spring). Work-Family Benefits: Which Ones Maximize Profits?, *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 13(1)

¹⁰ Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn, “There Are Significant Business Costs to Replacing Employees” (Center for American Progress, November 2012), <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/CostofTurnover.pdf>.

¹¹ National Partnership for Women & Families, “Paid Sick Days Are Good for Business,” October 2018, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-good-for-business-and-workers.pdf>.