



February 12, 2026

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the American Association of University Women, representing members in your state and across the nation, **I urge you to support working women and families—and the businesses that rely on them—by signing on as a cosponsor of the Healthy Families Act.**

This common-sense legislation would establish a national standard that allows workers to earn a small number of paid sick days to recover from illness or care for a sick family member without risking their jobs or their financial stability. Consistent with AAUW's long-standing commitment to work-life balance and women's economic security, paid sick days help keep workers and their families secure, workplaces and communities healthy, and our economy strong.

Today, one-fifth or 25 million U.S. private sector workers cannot earn paid sick days.¹ Without access to paid time off, workers are forced to make difficult decisions when they fall ill: either risk their employment and forgo a paycheck by missing work or go to work sick. The decision to go to work sick, not only harms workers but also poses a risk to public health when they work in public-facing industries, such as food service. A clear federal standard would ensure that workers across states and industries have a basic level of job protection, while providing employers with predictability and a uniform set of rules when providing sick leave.

The lack of paid sick days affects those with the fewest resources the most. Lower-wage workers, workers of color, part-time workers, and many of the women who shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities are the least likely to have access to paid sick days. When illness strikes, these workers are more likely to miss work and lose much-needed income, often delaying care for themselves to protect their families' budgets.² For an average family without paid sick days, just three and a half days of missed work due to sickness can be equal to foregoing an entire month's worth of groceries.³ Ensuring that all workers can earn paid sick days is a practical step toward a fairer labor market in which workers can work hard while taking good care of themselves, and their families have sufficient resources to survive.

A national paid sick days standard would also strengthen our economy. Working while sick—"presenteeism"—is estimated to cost the national economy nearly \$300 billion annually,

¹*Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2025*. (2025, September). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2025.htm>

² *Women, Work, and Family Health: Key Findings from the 2017 Kaiser Women's Health Survey*. (2018, March 13). KFF. <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/women-work-and-family-health-key-findings-from-the-2017-kaiser-womens-health-survey/>

³ Houghton, K., Binder, A. J., Eng, A., & Foote, A. (2024, February). *Is the Gender Wage Gap the Same at Different Education Levels?* U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/02/gender-wage-gap-education.html>



surpassing the cost of absenteeism.⁴ Paid sick days help reduce turnover, support productivity, and contribute to healthier workplaces. Many employers already recognize that allowing workers to recover from illness or care for a sick child is not only the right thing to do, but a sound business decision that protects their bottom line over the long term.

A national paid sick days standard would allow hardworking Americans to care for their health without jeopardizing their livelihoods or those of their families. The Healthy Families Act would:

- Give workers the ability to earn up to seven paid sick days a year to recover from short-term illnesses, care for a sick family member, access preventive care, or seek assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
- Cover all workers, regardless of company size.
- Define family members, partners, and children inclusively, acknowledging a broad range of caregiving relationships.

I urge you to become a **cosponsor of the Healthy Families Act** by contacting John Myron (john.myron@mail.house.gov) in Rep. Rosa DeLauro's office. Cosponsorship and votes associated with this legislation may be scored in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record* for the 119th Congress. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-728-3300 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Meghan Kissell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Meghan Kissell
Senior Director, Policy & Member Advocacy

⁴ Stewart, W. F., Ricci, J. A., Chee, E., & Morganstein, D. (2003). Lost Productive Work Time Costs From Health Conditions in the United States: Results From the American Productivity Audit. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 45(12), 1234–1246. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.jom.0000099999.27348.78> (Unpublished calculation based on \$225.8 billion [in 2002 dollars] annually in lost productivity, 71 percent due to presenteeism). Inflation calculation for 2025 dollars based on calculation of \$160.32 billion in 2002 dollars using Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator available at https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm