

Acting Justly for Healthy Families

Respecting the health and dignity of all human beings is a core religious value for all faith traditions. This includes not just access to health care, but time away from work to recuperate from illness, as well as to tend to ill family members. Yet nearly one half of American workers in the private sector cannot take a sick day without losing a day's pay, or even possibly their job. Nearly 100 million hard-working Americans cannot take time off to care for a sick child or elderly parent.

Our faith compels us to treat others as we would be treated. Many of us are blessed to be able to stay home to care for ourselves or our loved ones when illness strikes. Yet millions of our neighbors, employees, and others with whom we come into contact regularly, such as the cashier at the supermarket, the waiter at a restaurant, or the nurse at a hospital, do not have paid sick days. They must continue to work—through colds, fevers, and stomach flus, on pain of lost wages or even lost jobs. And they cannot take off to care for their sick children or other dependant family members.

The least fortunate among us bear a heavy burden when they get sick. Less than one quarter of low-wage workers have paid sick days, although they are the workers who can least afford to lose a day's pay, and whose jobs often require contact with the public or its food supply. For instance, 78 percent of food and public accommodation workers don't have a single paid sick day.

Working mothers bear a particularly heavy burden, as they lose pay, promotions, and general financial security when they are penalized for taking time off to care for sick children. In fact, according to the Urban Institute, 41 percent of working parents below 200 percent of the federal poverty line have no paid leave of any kind.

The Healthy Families Act was introduced in Congress in March 2007. The Act would grant seven paid sick days to workers to care for themselves or a family member. It would apply to firms with 15 or more workers. While no state currently has legislation providing for paid sick days, campaigns to pass such legislation are under way in several states. More than a dozen city and state legislatures are currently considering measures (Connecticut, DC, Florida, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri,

Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, West Virginia, Milwaukee and San Francisco). These efforts have laid the groundwork for legislative action in 2008. See www.paid sickdays.org for more information and to get involved in a local campaign near you.

What You Can Do

- **Urge your senators and congressperson to cosponsor the Healthy Families Act.** If your representatives are not cosponsors of the Health Families Act, urge them to sign on! Send them a letter or call their office and explain how every worker needs time off to care for themselves or a family member when they are sick. Urge them to cosponsor the Healthy Families Act.

- **Sign the petition to support paid sick days for tens of millions of U.S. workers.** See www.paid sickdays.org to sign on.

- **Organize a meeting with your congressional representative to discuss the need for paid sick days legislation.**

- **Ask your congregation, faith body, justice group, or other appropriate body to add their name to the organizational sign-on letter.**

Go to www.iwj.org/actnow/actnow.html to see the letter and e-mail Liz Weiss (lweiss@iwj.org) to have your organization added to it.

**“... I will bring health and healing to it;
I will heal my people and will let them
enjoy abundant peace and security.”**

Jeremiah 33:6

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