

# Women of Color Need a **Paid Sick Days** Standard

OCTOBER 2012

Every day, millions of workers in the United States are forced to jeopardize their wages and their jobs when they become sick or need to care for a sick child or loved one. For women – and particularly for women of color – the inability to earn paid sick days can have devastating consequences. It is past time for a national standard that would keep workers from having to make impossible choices between their families' financial security and their health.

## Women are the Backbone of Our Families and Communities

**In every corner of the United States, women care for their families and also bring home a significant share of their families' income.**

- ▶ **When illness strikes or family needs arise, women who cannot earn paid sick time face impossible choices between health and economic stability.** More than half of Latina workers (54 percent) and more than four in ten African American women who work (42 percent) are not able to earn paid sick days to recover from illness and many more can't earn sick time to care for an ill child or loved one.<sup>1</sup>

## Women of Color Cannot Afford to Lose Pay or Their Jobs

- ▶ **In many families, women of color are the primary source of financial support.** More than three million African American families with children have a female head of household<sup>2</sup> – most often a mother, grandmother or other relative who is her family's only source of support. The same is true for more than two million Latino families.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ **Women of color are paid less on average than other workers.** On average, African American women make \$260 less per week than white men. Latinas make \$340 less.<sup>4</sup> Lower earnings make it even tougher for women of color to take time off for illness or family care and still make ends meet.
- ▶ **Unpaid days off have real consequences.** For the typical family without paid sick days, just 3.5 days without pay is equivalent to losing an entire month of groceries.<sup>5</sup> For women of color, who are paid less on average, the situation is even more precarious.
- ▶ **And, in these tough economic times, job loss can be devastating.** Nearly one-quarter of workers report that they have lost a job or were told they would lose a job for taking time off due to personal or family illness.<sup>6</sup> And, when job loss occurs, unemployment too often is a long-term proposition that leads to significant financial hardship.

# America's Working Families Deserve a Solution

**A national paid sick days standard would allow millions of workers, including women of color, to earn job-protected paid sick days.** Overwhelming majorities recognize paid sick days as a basic worker right, and 87 percent of women, 95 percent of African Americans and 80 percent of Latinos support a federal law that would create a paid sick days standard.<sup>7</sup>

**The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1876/S. 984 in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress) would set a national standard.** For businesses with 15 or more employees, the bill would enable workers to earn up to seven paid sick days per year to recover from short-term illness, care for a sick family member, seek routine medical care or deal with the effects of domestic or sexual violence.

The Healthy Families Act would grant the ability to earn paid sick days to an additional:

- ▶ 13.3 million working women (a 48 percent increase);
- ▶ 3.9 million African American workers (a 60 percent increase);
- ▶ 5.6 million Latino workers (a 78 percent increase); and
- ▶ 14.7 million low-wage workers (a 186 percent increase).<sup>8</sup>

**States are leading the way.** In 2011, Connecticut became the first state and Seattle the fourth city to pass laws allowing workers to earn paid sick days. More than 20 states and localities across the country have introduced paid sick days bills or have active campaigns. Support and momentum are building. Learn more at [www.PaidSickDays.org](http://www.PaidSickDays.org).

---

1 Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2011, March). *Paid Sick Day Access Rates by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2010*. Retrieved 29 August 2012, from <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-day-access-rates-by-gender-and-race-ethnicity-2010>

2 United States Census Bureau. (2011). *Current Population Survey, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement: Families With Related Children Under 18 by Number of Working Family Members and Family Structure: 2010, Table POV07*. Retrieved 29 August 2012, from [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032011/pov/new07\\_000.htm](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032011/pov/new07_000.htm)

3 Ibid.

4 Full-time workers. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Household Data Annual Averages: Median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by selected characteristics (Table 37)*. Retrieved 21 September 2012, from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat37.pdf>

5 Gould, E., Filion, K., & Green, A. (2011, June). *The need for paid sick days: The lack of a federal policy further erodes family economic security*. Economic Policy Institute publication. Retrieved 21 August 2012, from [http://www.epi.org/publication/the\\_need\\_for\\_paid\\_sick\\_days/](http://www.epi.org/publication/the_need_for_paid_sick_days/)

6 Smith, T. and Kim, J. (2010, June). *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences* (p. 6). National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for the Public Welfare Foundation publication. Retrieved 29 August 2012, from <http://www.publicwelfare.org/resources/DocFiles/psd2010final.pdf>

7 Ibid.

8 U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee. (2010, March). *Expanding Access to Paid Sick Leave: The Impact of the Healthy Families Act on America's Workers*. Retrieved 29 August 2010, from [http://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File\\_id=abf8aca7-6b94-4152-b720-2d8d04b81ed6](http://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=abf8aca7-6b94-4152-b720-2d8d04b81ed6)

---

*The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [www.NationalPartnership.org](http://www.NationalPartnership.org).*

© 2012 National Partnership for Women & Families. All rights reserved.