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Coalition Stands with Mayor Fulop to Advance Earned Sick Days Ordinance in Jersey City

Ordinance is first of its kind in New Jersey, proponents say that it reflects growing momentum for earned sick days statewide

JERSEY CITY – With the City Council set to consider an ordinance guaranteeing earned sick days for workers next Wednesday, a diverse coalition of civic organizations, labor unions, and small business owners expressed their strong support for legislation they say will protect working families, improve public health and give Jersey City’s economy a boost.

“Every worker should be able to recover from an illness or take care of a sick family member without risking their livelihoods. Mayor Fulop’s proposal will provide real economic security to many low-wage workers, and it will also protect the public health while strengthening the city’s economy as a whole,” said Phyllis Salowe-Kaye, Executive Director of New Jersey Citizen Action and a spokesperson for the statewide Time to Care Coalition. “We look forward to working with the mayor to make sure that the rights of all Jersey City’s workers are protected.”

Over thirty-thousand Jersey City workers lack paid or unpaid sick days. “Paid sick days would make all the difference in my life,” said Da’ Quon Graham, a security officer from Jersey City and father. “Right now, if my baby gets sick for a day or two, I don’t get pay and we struggle to pay the bills.”

The proposed ordinance would guarantee up to five paid sick days a year for all workers in businesses with ten or more employees. Those employees are eligible to earn one hour of paid sick time for every thirty hours worked for up to a maximum of forty paid sick hours per year. Employees in businesses with less than ten employees are eligible to earn up to 40 hours of unpaid sick time. The legislation also provides for a study that would assess the impact of the bill over its first year and make recommendations on whether to extend paid sick days to all private sector workers next year.

“For workers without sick days, losing your job can be as easy as catching the flu, and that’s not right,” said Bill Holland, Executive Director of the New Jersey Working Families Alliance and Jersey City resident. “This legislation is a big step forward for workers and will make Jersey City a fairer, healthier place to live and work.”

“Workers who can’t take time off when they get sick end up taking their germs to work with them; they are contagious and spread illness to their co-workers and the public, including dangerous diseases like influenza,” said Bernie Gerard, RN, VP of Health Professionals and Allied Employees, AFT/AFL-CIO. “These are the people who serve our food and care for our children, and protecting their right to earned sick days should be a vital component of public health policy in any city.”

There's urgent need for earned sick day legislation in New Jersey, where approximately 1.2 million New Jersey workers lack earned sick days. In May Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt introduced legislation that would guarantee earned sick days throughout New Jersey.

This has been a landmark year for advancements in work-family policies fueled by a growing urgency for progress on popular, common sense solutions like earned sick days. This spring [Portland, Oregon](#) and [New York City](#) became the fourth and fifth cities to adopt earned sick days laws. These recent wins and active campaigns build on past victories in [Connecticut](#), [Seattle](#), [Washington, D.C.](#) and [San Francisco](#). Nationwide, [86 percent of voters support earned sick days](#).

Coalition leaders say that talks are underway to bring a similar ordinance to Newark later in the year.

"All across the country policymakers are realizing that guaranteeing earned sick days is not only the smart thing to do, it's the right thing to do," said Kevin Brown, State Director for SEIU 32BJ, which represents 9,000 workers statewide. "Jersey City is leading the way on this issue, but it's the first stop on the way to securing earned sick days for all New Jersey's workers."