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Sen. Weinberg, Asw. Lampitt, Workers, Advocates and Union Leaders Launch Statewide Earned Sick Days Campaign

Group Calls for Measure to Protect Public Health, Boost the Economy, and Strengthen Financial Security for Working Families

Trenton- Adding to the growing number of cities and states committed to ensuring that working people are able to take time off when they are sick, New Jersey state lawmakers, workers, small business owners, advocates and union leaders launched the New Jersey Earned Sick Days campaign at a State House media event today. A2354 / S785 was introduced in the new legislative session in both houses earlier this year.

“Victories for earned sick days in Jersey City and Newark have put New Jersey at the forefront of this nationwide fight for economic security. Now advocates and elected officials are building on that momentum to enact earned sick days statewide,” said **Phyllis Salowe-Kaye, Executive Director of New Jersey Citizen Action and member of the NJ Time to Care Coalition.**

In the summer of 2011, Connecticut passed the first statewide paid sick days law, followed soon after by a city-wide law in Seattle adding to the existing laws in San Francisco and Washington, DC. Earlier this year, Newark, and late last year, Jersey City, adopted some of the strongest paid sick laws in the nation. Just this April 1st, New York City strengthened their sick days law. Already, through these local actions and others, more than 2.1 million Americans newly won the right to earn sick days.

“NJ Working Families Alliance stands with the 1.1 million workers who can’t earn a single day to care for themselves or a sick family member. Denying workers paid sick days is inhumane, and the right to earn paid sick days should be extended to every single worker in New Jersey,” said **Analilia Mejia, Executive Director, NJ Working Families Alliance.**

New Jersey's bill, if passed, would be the strongest in the nation. The bill would cover all workers and give them the ability to not only stay home to care for themselves when sick, but for family members, including children, parents, siblings, grandparents and grandchildren. Unlike the Connecticut law, the New Jersey bill covers all workers regardless of the size of the business or the industry sector in which it falls.

“Workers who need time off to care for themselves or a family member should not be forced to make the unfair choice between their health and a paycheck. Guaranteeing a minimum standard of earned sick leave for all workers is the compassionate and the sensible thing to do for our state. It will create a healthier and safer work environment for employees, but also will protect the health of the public. Businesses, in turn, will benefit from these improved conditions,” said **Senate Majority Leader Weinberg who is the main sponsor of the bill in the Senate.** “Cities across the country, and in our state, have already moved to provide earned sick leave to workers. Implementing a strong earned sick leave law in New Jersey that benefits workers, businesses and the public health statewide just makes sense.”

After six years with an earned sick time law in San Francisco, more than two in three San Francisco businesses

support the local law with six in seven reporting no negative impact on profitability. In October, San Francisco was named by Pricewaterhouse Coopers as one of the [Top 2012 Cities of Opportunity](#) for its sustainability, livability and quality of life. Senior Vice President for Policy at the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce said the impact of the law on employers had been minimal and that the local economy was “booming.”

“For many business owners, this isn’t just the right thing to do, it’s the smart thing. Providing sick days to your employees lowers turnover costs, increases morale and productivity, improves customer service, and lowers health care costs. Everybody benefits,” **said Anita Thomas with the New Jersey Main Street Alliance, a network of over 1400 small businesses across New Jersey.**

Economists say job retention policies like earned sick time help reduce unemployment and strengthen economic recovery, including 20 New Jersey economists who signed a letter to the Legislature in support of earned sick time last year.

“This bill is the result of collaboration between our office, advocates and the business community. It’s the right thing to do for workers, but it will also improve public health. Recent research shows that the policy will also have a positive effect on businesses and the economy,” **said Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt, the primary bill sponsor in the Assembly.**

Perhaps the best illustration of the public health risks associated with workers who cannot stay home when sick is the spread of contagion experienced during the 2009-2010 H1N1 epidemics. During the epidemic, infected employees who attended work are estimated to have caused the infection of an additional seven million people and 1,500 deaths. If restaurant workers, who have a high level of contact with the public and food, continue to be denied paid sick days, New Jersey will remain ill-prepared for containing future outbreaks of contagious diseases.

In President Obama’s state of the Union address, the President called for a national paid sick days policy, as one of several steps we could take to support working women, their families and to bring security to all Americans. “We could not agree more with the President. By passing a strong state paid sick days policy here in New Jersey, we’ll be sending a strong message to Congress that they must act. We must support working women who juggle so much, in order to make life better for their families,” **said Lizette Delgado-Polanco, Executive Director of SEIU State Council.**

So many constituents of AARP are members of the “sandwich” generation -- mostly women serving as both caregivers of their children and their frail parents. They are also grandparents raising some 140,000 grandchildren in New Jersey. Earned sick pay is a necessity for these stressed-out folk, who are being pulled in all directions when they or any of their charges become ill,” **said Marilyn Askin, Chief Legislative Advocate, AARP.**

“Today many of us cannot afford to take care of ourselves or family when we are sick because we need to choose between losing one paid day of work or our health. If I decide to take a day off at the end I will not be able to pay my bills.” **Said Jesus Medina, restaurant worker from Paterson, New Jersey.**

Josefa Caballero, a restaurant worker and member of New Labor added that “Not having paid sick days means making the difficult decision between taking care of my family’s health and putting food on the table”

Karen White, Director of the Working Families Program at the Rutgers Center for Women and Work and member of the NJ Time to Care Coalition concluded, “Research has consistently shown that earned sick days laws benefit employers, employees and consumers alike. Making sure that working families can afford to stay home when they or a loved one are sick without fear of falling behind on bills or losing their job is good for our economy, our health and the workers who need them.”

The [New Jersey Time to Care Coalition](#) is a broad-based group of community, advocacy, union, religious, research, and academic organizations working to support policies that strengthen communities by ensuring that working families can balance their responsibilities at home and on the job.