

WORKING MATTERS

MARYLAND CAMPAIGN FOR PAID SICK DAYS



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For Immediate Release

January 31, 2013

Maryland Lawmakers File Earned Sick and Safe Time Act

Legislation would establish paid sick days standard to protect public health and strengthen Maryland families

ANNAPOLIS – As the nation faces one of the worst influenza outbreaks in a decade, two state lawmakers announced their plan to introduce legislation that establishes a paid sick days standard in Maryland. During a Thursday morning press conference Delegate John A. Olszewski, Jr. (D-Dist. 6) and Senator Robert J. Garagiola (D-Dist. 15) discussed the Earned Sick and Safe Time Act, a measure supported by the Working Matters coalition and 65 nonprofit, community, and faith groups.

“It seems logical that workers should have opportunity to earn leave that allows them to stay home for an illness. And yet, many Maryland workers are forced to decide between coming to work sick, sending a sick child to school or daycare or staying home, and sacrificing income and risking job loss,” Garagiola said. “Not only is this harmful to our workers, but also to our businesses that experience costly and unnecessary turnover rates, along with the loss of a productive and healthy workforce.”

More than 700,000* people in our state cannot earn paid sick days to use when they or a loved one is ill. Lack of access to paid sick days disproportionately affects low wage and service industry workers, often forcing these Marylanders to choose between their health and their economic stability. Without access to paid sick days, many people choose to work when they shouldn't, often spreading disease to customers, clients and coworkers. The Center for Disease Control estimates that [7 million Americans](#) were infected by co-workers who went to work sick during the 2009 H1N1 outbreak.

The Earned Sick and Safe Time Act is widely supported by small business owners, workers, doctors, health care practitioners, and working families and a 2012 Hart Research Poll shows 82 percent of Maryland voters favor access to paid sick days. The measure will allow full-time workers to earn one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, or up to seven paid sick days each year for full-time workers. Part-time workers will accrue fewer days per year, depending on the number of hours worked. Employees will begin to earn paid sick days as soon as they begin work. All over Maryland, parents are sending sick children to school because they are unable to take a day off or are unable to afford a loss in pay to stay home with an ill child. This means sick children often come to school where they infect other students or wait in a school nurse's office for hours until a parent can finally retrieve them.

“Many times parents can’t come and pick up their child because if they miss a day, they lose a job,” said Mary Stein, a school nurse in Howard County. “Children are not getting appropriate medical treatment. It’s happening more frequently than anybody knows.”

Studies show that earned sick days can have a big impact on workplace productivity. According to the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, workers who underperform because of illness cost employers an [estimated \\$160 billion each year](#). Job retention policies like paid sick days reduce turnover, drive down unemployment and strengthen the economy by enabling workers to meet their financial obligations in the face of illness and emergencies.

Andy Shallal, owner of the Busboys and Poets restaurants in Maryland and Washington, D.C., already offers sick leave to his workers. He says it makes sense to provide workers with sick time, especially when they interact directly with customers and food.

“The fact of the matter is we’ve been doing this now for three years, so we have a track record,” Shallal said. “We have a lot of employees, so we have an actual body of data that we can use. Less than 1 percent of our payroll goes to pay for sick leave.”

Across the country, cities and states have adopted paid sick days policies to help improve public health and bolster the economic recovery. In the summer of 2011, [Connecticut](#) passed the first statewide paid sick days law, followed soon after by a city-wide law in [Seattle](#). Such laws already exist in San Francisco and Washington, DC. Momentum for paid sick days legislation is also growing around the country with active campaigns in [Philadelphia](#), [Portland](#), [Massachusetts](#), [New York City](#) and [other](#) locations. San Francisco, which has had an earned sick days law for six years, was rated by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2011 as one of the top cities in the world to do business, and more than [two in three San Francisco businesses](#) support the local law with six in seven reporting no negative impact on profitability.

“The Earned Sick and Safe Time Act directly supports working class families. We cannot afford to wait to implement this policy,” Olszewski said. “A paid sick days standard would mean thousands of struggling Marylanders are able to keep a job, make a mortgage payment, and better care for their children.”

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*Institute for Women’s Policy Research. (2013, January.) *Access to Paid Sick Days*

About Working Matters: *Working Matters is a coalition of organizations committed to advancing the Maryland Campaign for Paid Sick Days. Founding members include the Job Opportunities Task Force, Public Justice Center and United Workers. Sixty-five organizations have signed on in support of Working Matters and the Earned Sick and Safe Time Act.*