

Healthy Families & Workplaces/Paid Sick Days Act (HB 817)

The Issue

Currently, nearly 1.6 million workingⁱ North Carolinians have no paid sick time. When they or their loved ones get sick, they have to take unpaid time off, losing much needed pay. People frequently face retaliation – including being fired – by their employers for calling out sick. Due to these pressures, working people often make the choice to come to work sick and can spread illness to their customers and coworkers. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more clear that paid sick days are a common sense, life-saving policy. The time has come for lawmakers to implement a paid sick days policy for working North Carolinians and their families.

What the Bill Does

The Healthy Families & Workplaces/Paid Sick Days Act (HB 817) would allow employees to earn an hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked; up to four days per year for employees of small businesses and up to seven days per year for employees of medium and larger businesses.

Who Does This Policy Help?

- ➔ **A significant portion (42%) of the private-sector workforce** would no longer miss crucial wages and have greater job security when caring for their own health needs or the needs of their family membersⁱⁱ.
- ➔ **Paid sick days especially help low-income workers who cannot otherwise afford to take time off.** Low-income workers (disproportionately women and people of color) are significantly less likely to have paid sick days. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 60 percent of U.S. workers in the bottom tenth as well as 43 percent of workers in the bottom quartile of the income distribution lack access to paid sick leave, compared to 21 percent of workers across all income levelsⁱⁱⁱ.

- ➔ **Paid sick days keep children of working parents safer and healthier.** When parents are able to care for their sick children, children recover more quickly, are less likely to develop serious illnesses, and have improved overall health. Access to paid sick days makes children more likely to receive annual checkups and vaccinations^{iv}. Sick days are also an important tool to prevent child abuse and neglect, as children of parents who have access to paid sick days are less likely to be placed with unsafe or unqualified caregivers. Few childcare centers offer care options for sick children.
- ➔ **Paid sick days are a frontline policy to protect public health.** Sick employees who go to work risk infecting their customers and coworkers, hurting business productivity, customer sales, and profitability^v. Parents who cannot afford to miss work often make the tough choice to send children with contagious illnesses to childcare facilities or school, contributing to high rates of infection. Paid sick days help stop the spread of contagious diseases. One study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, access to paid sick days was associated with a significant decrease in the number of new cases^{vi}.

The Business Case for Paid Sick Days

- ➔ **Forcing workers to come to work sick hurts workplace safety and productivity.** In a recent study, employers who provided paid sick leave to their employees reported fewer occupational injuries than those who did not. Paid sick time also makes recovery easier and reduces the likelihood of complications, which means employees can return to work sooner^{vii}.
- ➔ **Paid sick days would provide significant savings in reduced turnover.** Seventy-three percent of working North Carolinians surveyed said they would feel more committed to their companies if they offered more family-friendly policies^{viii}. The cost of losing an employee (lost productivity and recruiting, interviewing and training a replacement) is often far greater than the cost of providing short-term leave to retain existing employees^{ix}.

→ **Healthy workers are critical to a productive and vibrant economy.** Employers that provide paid sick days benefit from reduced turnover, increased employee loyalty and morale, higher productivity, and decreased spread of contagion in the workplace. The U.S. loses billions of dollars each year in both productivity losses and absenteeism from sick workers^{x, xi}.

Paid sick days benefit families, employers, public health and the economy. It's time to pass a paid sick days policy for working North Carolinians and their families.

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Learn more
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