



## No Paid Sick Days? Corporate Cents vs. Common Sense

**44 million Americans work with no paid sick days. Many are restaurant and healthcare workers. Large corporations funnel political donations to squash changes in laws that would make us safer and healthier. We need help asking Americans to support the folks fighting against corporate insensitivity and obstructionism.**



#### THE ISSUE:

For most of the people reading this page: you get sick, and you stay home from work. But for more than 44 million Americans without paid sick days: if they get sick and stay home, they lose their job. So when they get sick, they go to work. And we get sick - during the H1N1 epidemic, 8 million Americans came to work with the virus and infected another 7 million people. It's time to stop this.

#### WHY IS YOUR STORY IMPORTANT?

A movement is growing to put this issue on state ballots. Some large corporations, from Disney to fast food companies, are making political donations aimed at squashing the changes in laws that would make all of us safer and healthier. They are claiming paid sick time is bad for the bottom line, but research shows that's just not true. Are we going to let their desire for a few extra cents get in the way of common sense?

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## Background

Think about the last time you were really sick. Or someone in your family was. Were you able to stay at home? Six in 10 Americans can answer yes to that question. You probably don't abuse it. It's a tiny safety net, allowing you to get better quickly and not to have sick people show up in your workforce.

Yet that's not the case for four of 10 Americans. They happen to be low wage service industry workers. And that makes it worse for all of us.

Americans working without earned sick time, who number more than 44 million, a total of 38% of all workers, are forced to choose between their financial security and their health. These people's jobs are at risk when they call in sick. 23% of workers have lost a job or been threatened with job loss for taking time to care for a personal or family illness, according to the National Opinion Research Center. Even when jobs are protected, those without access to earned sick time are least likely to be able to afford unpaid time off.

Those earning low-wages are the least likely to have earned sick time. Four of five don't have access to sick time. Many of those workers are food service workers, personal health care workers, childcare workers and restaurant workers.

In Miami-Dade County, the 7th largest county in the country, the disparity of workers without earned sick time is even more profound. The facts are startling! A survey conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (December, 2012) showed that 45.8% of Miami-Dade private sector workers did not have access to sick days - 415,116 people. 4/5ths of these are either people of color or women.

A report released by ROC-United in August of 2012, "Backed into a Corner," revealed that more than 88% of Miami restaurant workers cannot earn any sick days at all. The report indicated that 47% of those restaurant workers had gone to work sick because they could not afford to lose a day's wages. And 27% of those workers reported that they had either sneezed or coughed while handling or preparing food.

The majority of those low-wage workers without sick time work closely with the public elevating the potential for the spread of contagion, increasing not only the public health risk but also the cost of local healthcare. Businesses also suffer as employees who go to work sick stay ill longer and spread the illness to their co-workers, affecting productivity. And what happens when your child is sick? Some jobs give you the flexibility to provide the care they need. With no paid sick days, sick children are often left home alone when a parent cannot stay to care for them or



sent to school ill, thus spreading the illness to other children.

Everyone's health is at risk when people are forced to go to work sick. During the H1N1 epidemic, 8 million Americans went to work while sick with the swine flu virus, and infected another 7 million.

There is a great need for an earned sick time policy in Miami-Dade County. Earned sick time ordinances/laws allow workers to earn a basic number of paid sick days, ensure they can use that time for their own health needs or to care for a family member, and protect workers from retaliation when they use the days they have earned.

A majority of Miami-Dade residents are in favor of earned sick time according to a survey conducted last spring by Public Policy Polling that showed 80% of Floridians would support a law that ensured earned sick time for workers. We need to create opportunities now to educate our state legislators and elected officials on the need for earned sick time policies.

### **But...**

The conservative Florida State Legislative passed HB 655 during the 2013 legislative session. HB 655 prevents any local government across the state of Florida from passing an earned sick time law for their own constituents.

We know who led the opposition fight in Tallahassee to kill earned sick time.

Multi-national conglomerates allocated considerable resources to persuade Rick Scott, Florida's Governor, to sign a law overriding (or "preempting") any local earned sick leave ordinances which was passed in May 2013. While these multi-national conglomerates pay to have their interests prioritized by our government, the public is left out of a conversation that primarily affects them. We want to bring awareness to this 'David and Goliath' dynamic that is currently at play. We want the public to hear the right message and to know what is really happening between these large corporations, their lobbyists and our government as it pertains to the earned paid sick time policy initiatives. The Walt Disney Company, which is comprised of five large segments-- Disney products, parks and recreation, studios, media and networks and the Disney interactive-- is one of the largest employers in our state, employing hundreds of thousands of individuals. Disney has consistently opposed and lobbied against earned paid sick days for their workers. Darden Restaurants, Inc., which includes Long Horn Steakhouse, Olive Garden, Red Lobster, The Capital Grille, Yard House, Wildfish Seafood Grille, and many other restaurants, has also actively opposed the campaign.

An earned sick day standard also benefits employers by reducing turnover, decreasing the spread of illness at the workplace and elevating the practices of socially responsible businesses. Paid sick days help workers without hurting business. Studies have shown that paid sick day laws provide significant benefits for workers without negatively impacting business. While the costs to business are small, the benefits are substantial. According to the Main Street Alliance of Washington's report, Paid Sick Days and the Seattle Economy "Multiple national studies have found that providing paid sick leave can benefit businesses through higher morale and productivity, less absenteeism, and lower rates of turnover, offsetting some or all of an employer's direct cost of providing paid leave. San Francisco's job market has compared favorably to the surrounding counties and the state of California as a whole since the sick days law went into effect there in 2007, including in food services. The Washington, D.C. Auditor found that that city's 2008 sick and safe leave law "neither discouraged business owners from locating in the District nor encouraged business owners to move their businesses from the District." These findings are also consistent with studies of increases in state minimum wages, which also particularly impact food service and retail firms and their employees.

The most recent, economically sophisticated studies rely on large amounts of data from many states with differing minimum wages. Contrary to some earlier minimum wage studies, these newer studies find no significant impact on employment numbers resulting from minimum wage increases. These studies have also found that an increased minimum wage did result in higher average monthly earnings and substantial drops in job separations and turnover among low wage earners. Higher wages are offset by lower costs for hiring and training new workers and increases in worker productivity."

Even if paid sick days as a whole impacted employers' bottom line negatively, according to national data compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, most workers do not use all the sick leave they have available, taking on average 2 to 3 days per year. Why then, would some employers anticipate a greater use of sick days than actually occurs?

Could it be that big business is wary of Earned Paid Sick Time because it potentially opens up a larger, national conversation about workers' rights, employee benefits, parity, what it means to have organized labor and the very economic model under which we operate?

This last point is a deeper one. Why do we the public not want the benefits that many of us enjoy to be extended to low wage workers? Do we see them differently? Why?

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Paid sick days is a national campaign that's gained traction in some of the country's most productive metropolises. In San Francisco, where a paid sick days law has been in effect for several years, two in three business owners support the city's paid sick days law, and six of seven employers say it has had no impact on profitability.



This March, Portland, Oregon became the fourth city to adopt paid sick days. Connecticut passed the first statewide law in 2011. Paid sick days became law in Seattle in 2011, Washington, D.C. in 2008, and San Francisco in 2006. Efforts are also underway to pass such laws in Florida, Vermont, Massachusetts, Philadelphia and New York City. At the federal level, Rep. Rosa Delauro and Senator Tom Harkin introduced the Healthy Families Act, which would set a National sick days standard.

### **Goals:**

We would like to find a compelling way to show that earned sick days is a pretty simple idea that the general public should support, both for their own sake and for the sake of workers. We would like to develop some punchy campaigns/campaign ideas to target the large corporations who are actively opposing such legislation.

We would like to open up the idea of what does it mean to be a low wage worker in America? Is the way that they are treated, compared to higher wage workers, fair? Is "fair" even how we should be thinking about this?

### **Target Audiences:**

We would like to help generate public support for this specific initiative, as part of a larger goal to extend the benefits that many better-off Americans enjoy to lower wage workers. So our audience would be open/sympathetic or even mildly skeptical Americans who interact with low wage workers primarily in service jobs. We would like them to see the low wage worker not simply in service, but to better connect with them, and to see how paid sick leave days could be a good idea.

There might be a broader worry of "abuse" of entitlements. If low-income people are given "up to 9 sick days", will they simply take all of them? No - the evidence is clear (see above). But what's the public mindset? The general public will never extend benefits to people if they think that those benefits will be abused. We don't believe that the majority of low-income workers abuse their benefits. We'd like to have campaign pieces "in our back pocket" that we could use to inoculate people against this abuse mindset. This is one of the issues that leads to policy differences in dealing with low-income communities/people.

Ideas/hooks

We have developed some ideas around the "david vs goliath" part of our issue. Some ideas are:

- Compare the compensation package for Disney executives to that of their workers, and create a message showcasing the inequity.
- Have individuals dress up like Disney characters and stand outside of Disney stores and parks, hospitals, and businesses appearing to be sick while interacting with passersby.



- Parody of the show 'Undercover Boss' where the boss shows up to spend a week working in the shoes of his/her modestly paid employee. Except in this episode, the boss gets sick and discovers that she can't stay home.
- Media campaign that alerts the public on how many days Rick Scott takes off per year, and asks that he commit to the Floridian worker's challenge: no days off all year.
- Onion-style headlines that catch the media's attention, such as "Florida has highest rate of uninsured, yet rejects Medicaid expansion and paid sick days."
- Hold "actions" outside of a restaurant and have organizers engage customers and people walking by with visuals, someone impersonating/dressed like Rick Scott handing out contaminated food.

We need your help in developing some ideas around conveying the idea that paid sick days will be helpful for low income workers

- maybe taking care of the sick child angle;
- maybe it's about a low income person they interact with
- Out there idea - a vouching platform, people with sick days agree to vouch for people who don't have them; if on average they take all 9, we'll forgo 4 of our sick days;

And we need help thinking about how to try to shift perspectives on low-income people abusing any benefits they receive - whether it's specifically sick days, or whether it's other benefits more generally.