



Department of Social Development and World Peace  
Office of Domestic Social Development

**Background on Paid Sick Leave**  
February 2007

## ISSUE

Contrary to popular belief, not all workers have *paid* sick leave to care for themselves or their families when they are ill. With the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act over ten years ago, most full-time workers have up to 12 weeks a year of a combination of **unpaid family leave** for the birth or adoption of a child; or **unpaid medical leave** such as an employee's own serious illness or that of a child, spouse, or parent. Many full-time workers have *paid* leave that they can use to take time off from work when they or their families are ill. But not all workers have this essential benefit. Almost half (47%) of full-time, private-sector workers have no paid sick days. 76% of low-wage workers have no paid sick leave. A Urban Institute study shows that for working parents with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line, 41% have *no paid leave of any kind* (no paid sick leave, no paid vacation, no paid personal days).

A minimum amount of paid sick leave levels the playing field for covered employers and will have no impact on companies that already provide paid sick leave. The costs of losing an employee (advertising for, interviewing and training a replacement) alone can be far greater than the cost of providing short-term leave to retain existing employees.

The Healthy Families Act in the last Congress required all employers with at least 15 or more employees to provide 7 days of paid sick leave annually for full-time employees (working at least 30 hours/week or 1500 hours/year), and a pro-rata amount of leave for part-time employees working at least 20 hours/week or 1000 hours/year. Leave could be used to meet an employee's own medical needs or to allow an employee to care for the medical needs of a family member. We expect a similar bill to be introduced soon.

## USCCB Position

The Domestic Policy Committee supported the Healthy Families Act of 2005 as a reasonable extension of our efforts to promote family-friendly workplace policies found in *Putting Children and Families First*. Public policy should protect people who have to take time away from their jobs to handle serious family responsibilities. Parents should not have to worry about being penalized for taking care of themselves, a sick child or spouse. Such legislation would not only help family life but would send a message that children and families are high priorities within our society.

## Action

Urge Members of Congress to support the Healthy Families Act. Watch the USCCB/SDWP website and ALERTS on paid sick leave activity in the 110th Congress.

## For More Information

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