



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Sick Leave at Issue in H1N1 Preparations** *CDC Calls for Flexible Sick Leave Policies*

(Augusta) Today, a sold-out audience of more than 1,000 people will gather at the Augusta Civic Center for a summit on H1N1 flu preparation. Yesterday, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released [Preparing for the Flu: A Communication Toolkit for Businesses and Employers](#), which includes recommendations from the CDC and a letter cosigned by the Secretaries of Commerce, Health and Human Services, and Labor.

Their advice is simple: Plan ahead and “encourage sick workers to stay home without penalty.”

Providing sick leave to workers can minimize business disruption and keep workers—and customers—safe. But while it may seem obvious that sick people should be encouraged to stay home from work when they are sick—workplaces, after all, are a “point of spread” for disease—staying home to prevent the spread of pandemic flu may simply not be an option for thousands of Maine workers. Today, nearly half of full-time private sector workers have no paid sick days. And, for those in the restaurant and accommodation industries—those who are most likely to interact with the public—86% lack paid sick days.

When illness strikes, people without paid sick days have a tough choice: go to work sick and put their own health and their co-workers' health at risk or stay home to recover and lose pay and perhaps even their jobs.

That's why, beyond encouraging employers to provide sick leave voluntarily, the CDC, Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor should call for passage of the **Healthy Families Act** (H.R.2460/S.1152). This bill, introduced in Congress, simply ensures that employers allow all workers to earn a minimum of seven paid sick days per year.

It's time to pass a paid sick days standard to protect workers and the public. Without it, there are gaping holes in our public health safety net.

*The Maine Women's Lobby is a non-partisan, non-profit, membership organization working since 1978 to increase opportunities for women and girls through advocacy and legislative action.*

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