



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

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Paid Sick Days Needed to Limit H1N1 in Schools and Workplaces

Augusta - On Tuesday, a prominent local physician joined Senate President Libby Mitchell and advocates for seniors, women, and survivors of violence to urge passage of "An Act to Aid in the Prevention of the Spread of H1N1 Influenza by ensuring the Provision of Earned Paid Sick Time." The bill was recently approved for introduction by Legislative Council by a vote of 10-0.

The bill, introduced by Senate President Libby Mitchell, would provide approximately six paid sick days annually for large businesses and approximately three days for small businesses. The time could be used to care for oneself or a family member for illness or in relation to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Public health officials have repeatedly cautioned that the best way to stop the spread of H1N1 is for workers to stay home if they are sick and for parents to keep children who are sick home from school. In August, the White House released a report of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology which estimated that H1N1 could infect as many as 120 million Americans this winter, resulting in the death of as many as 90,000 Americans.

A 2007 study by the Trust for America's Health (released prior to the current recession and the outbreak of H1N1) projected that a pandemic flu outbreak would cause a \$2.4 billion drop in Maine's GDP and cost 11,000 people their lives. By taking action to enable private sector workers to take care of themselves during this public health crisis, Maine lawmakers will protect Maine's economic recovery and the public's health.

Said Dr. Daniel Summers, an Augusta physician specializing in Adolescent Medicine and Pediatrics, "I'm telling the parents of the children I treat, stay home when you're sick and keep your children home from school and day care when they are sick. But until all of these parents have paid sick days, I know many will not be able to follow my advice." He continued, "This is one of those situations where we need the State Legislature to step in. Every parent I talk to should be in the position to take my advice for their own safety, the safety of their children, and the safety of the public at large. But until we pass this law, there will be those who won't be able to do what is best for their family's health, the public health and the health of our economy..."

Said Senate President Libby Mitchell, “Without job-protected paid sick days, workers will risk their paychecks and even their jobs if they stay home when they or their children contract H1N1. I introduced this bill because, especially during a public health emergency, it is our shared responsibility to ensure that every Mainer can protect their health and the public’s health.”

Sarah Standiford, Executive Director of the Maine Women’s Lobby, noted that it is during the recession, especially, that workers need these protections. Losing a job can be catastrophic and can add demands on already strained state services. She said, “That’s why a policy such as job-protected paid sick days is a job retention strategy – a boost for workers and their families, a benefit to business and also a prerequisite for public health.”

*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,
www.mainewomen.org.*

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