



# Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

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## An Act to Prevent the Spread of H1N1 (L.D.1665)

*HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius has said that "one of the most important things that employers can do is to make sure their human resources and leave policies are flexible and follow public health guidance."<sup>1</sup>*

### **Paid sick days protect public health and public safety.**

When you work hard in Maine, you should be able to care for yourself and your family when illness strikes, especially in the case of a public health crisis such as pandemic flu. Unfortunately, nearly one out of every two full-time workers in Maine is denied even a single paid sick day.<sup>2</sup> As a result, employees must choose – either come to work sick and risk spreading their illness or stay home and risk losing a day's pay...or even their job.

It shouldn't be that way.

### **Paid sick days support families and protect public health.**

Lack of paid sick days can have serious public health consequences.

Staying at home when infected could reduce by 15-34 % the proportion of people impacted by pandemic flu. Unfortunately, approximately 92% of Maine's restaurant industry workers have no paid sick days at all.<sup>3</sup> Workers in child care centers, retail, and nursing homes also tend to lack paid sick days.<sup>4</sup> We will all be healthier when all workers have paid sick days.

*"I recently worked at a preschool for kids with autism and worked one on one with children on a daily basis. These children often come to school sick because their guardians were unable to get time off to care for their child. As a result, I was sick on a regular basis. I was shocked by how often the staff at the preschool became ill. It was a circular problem, which could have been stopped if sick days were allowed."*

-Katie, Old Town

When cared for by their parents, children recover from illness more rapidly, and serious illness can be prevented.<sup>5</sup> But right now, parents can be forced to bring a sick child to school or day care where they infect other children. And in the event of a declared public health emergency, such as an outbreak of H1N1 when schools or day care centers are forced to close, parents face another dilemma: who will take care of the kids?

## **Paid sick days support workplace productivity.**

No worker should have to risk their own health or the public's just to come to work. But all too often, people are forced to come to work and risk spreading illness to colleagues and customers.

*“As a businessperson in Maine, there are always two bottom lines – what makes the most money in the short term, and what is best in the long term. In my 30 years in business, I have always provided my employees with the basics. Providing sick days keeps my business efficient and working at peak productivity. I don’t have to pay expenses for recruiting or retraining because of unnecessary turnover. And, I don’t run the risk of spreading illness to my customers. My workers have higher morale, and that makes my business both a great place to work, and a more profitable one.”*

- Andy Graham, owner, Portland Color

This has an impact on businesses’ bottom line. According to recent research, benefits for Maine employers will total \$37 Million annually; with each employer saving an average of \$4.18 per worker per week. These savings come from reduced workplace turnover as well as increased worker productivity.<sup>7</sup>

## **Paid safe days support families and protect public safety.**

Maine’s law already provides *unpaid leave* for workers seeking social or legal services pertaining to stalking, domestic violence, or sexual abuse. However, when seeking safety for themselves and their children, few women can afford to utilize this law. “Safe days” is paid time a worker can access when preparing for and attending court proceedings, receiving medical treatment, to attend to medical treatment for a victim who is a family member, or to obtain necessary services to remedy a crisis caused by domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Victims of domestic violence often stay with their abusers in order to keep their housing, health care, or income.<sup>8</sup> Paid sick and *safe days* would protect victims’ paychecks and jobs when they need time off to seek assistance.

## **Help pass LD 1665: “An Act to Prevent the Spread of H1N1:”**

The law would:

- ❖ Provide for paid time off in the event of a public health emergency to provide critical care for yourself or a family member.
- ❖ Exempt businesses that already provide paid sick days as part of their combined time off policies (sick, vacation and/or holiday all combined into one).
- ❖ Include time to recover from illness, receive preventative care, or to use in relation to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.
- ❖ Guarantee workers one hour of paid sick time for every 40 hours worked (or approximately 6 days annually) at large businesses with 25 or more employees.
- ❖ Guarantee workers one hour of paid sick time for every 80 hours worked (or 3 ¼ days annually) at small businesses with fewer than 25 employees.

## **Maine Families Deserve Paid Sick Days and Safe Days.**

The vast majority of American voters already believe paid sick days are already guaranteed! But, the shocking truth is that three quarters of low-wage workers<sup>9</sup>, and nearly half of full-time workers lacks this protection.

### **87% of Maine voters believe that Maine should require paid sick days.<sup>10</sup>**

Paid sick days and safe days are a workplace standard whose time has come. But, we need your help to make it happen. To get involved, contact the Maine Women's Lobby at 207.622.0851 or [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org).

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<sup>1</sup> HHS News Release, 8/19/09, [www.hhs.gov/news/press/2009pres/08/20090819a.html](http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2009pres/08/20090819a.html)

<sup>2</sup> Maine Center for Economic Policy analysis using the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) Paid Sick Days Estimator, [http://www.iwpr.org/Work/Research\\_work.htm#PSDtoolkit](http://www.iwpr.org/Work/Research_work.htm#PSDtoolkit). The Estimator uses IWPR analysis of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' March 2006 National Compensation Survey.

<sup>3</sup> The Restaurant Opportunities Center of Maine and the Maine Restaurant Industry Coalition's Maine Restaurant Industry Report, forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> Vicky Lovell. 2004. *No Time to be Sick*. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

<sup>5</sup> Jody Heymann, Alison Earle, and Brian Egleston. 1996. "Parental Availability for the Care of Sick Children," *Pediatrics*. 98: 226-230.

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Miller and Claudia Williams. 2009. *Valuing Good Health in Maine: The Costs and Benefits of Paid Sick Days*. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

<sup>8</sup> D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Paid Safe Days Benefit Both Domestic Violence Victims and Employers, 2007. National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women, Economic Security VAWA Factsheet, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Jody Heymann. 2000. *The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It*. New York: Basic Books. p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> Lake Research Partners. *Paid Sick Days Survey*. July 2007.