

# The District of Columbia is Leading the Way Toward a National Paid Sick Days Standard

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In 2008, the District of Columbia became the second jurisdiction in the nation to guarantee workers the right to earn paid sick days. Workers in the District can earn between three and seven paid sick days each year, depending on the size of their employers, to seek medical care or care for their own or a loved one's health.

**The District of Columbia is among a growing list of states and localities across the country that have or will soon have paid sick days laws in place.** A list of current laws is available at [NationalPartnership.org/PSDLaws](http://NationalPartnership.org/PSDLaws), and details on each of these laws are available at [NationalPartnership.org/PSDstatutes](http://NationalPartnership.org/PSDstatutes). A growing body of evidence shows that these laws are working well.<sup>1</sup>

Still, access to paid sick time should not depend on where a person lives or works. Nationwide, more than 43 million private sector workers – nearly 40 percent of the workforce<sup>2</sup> – cannot earn paid sick time. When workers do not have paid sick days, the consequences can be significant. For a typical U.S. family without paid sick days, 3.5 days lost to illness are equivalent to the family's entire monthly grocery budget.<sup>3</sup>

## Paid Sick Days Benefit Families, Business and Our Economy

- ▶ **Paid sick days keep families healthy.** When workers have paid sick days, they are able to get regular physicals and take their children to well-child visits and for immunizations, which may prevent serious illnesses.<sup>4</sup> Children with serious illnesses do better when their parents are able to stay with them.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ **Paid sick days are good for business.** Employee turnover is expensive – on average, one-fifth of an employee's annual salary.<sup>6</sup> Paid sick days result in reduced turnover,<sup>7</sup> which leads to reduced hiring and training costs for businesses.
- ▶ **Paid sick days decrease unnecessary health care costs.** Universal access to paid sick days would eliminate an estimated 1.3 million emergency room visits each year, saving \$1.1 billion annually in costs to individuals, private insurers and public programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid.<sup>8</sup>

## The District's Paid Sick Days Experience

Contrary to concerns raised by employer organizations prior to the adoption of the District's paid sick days law in 2008, a 2013 audit by the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor found **no evidence that**



**the law prompted businesses to leave the city or discouraged employers from establishing new businesses in it.**<sup>9</sup> In 2013, the D.C. City Council expanded the District’s paid sick days law to include all workers and to allow workers to begin accruing paid sick time earlier in their job tenures. The original law excluded tipped restaurant and bar workers and permitted employers an exceptionally long probationary period before which employees did not accrue paid sick time.

## Setting a National Standard Should Be a Priority

Beyond the District of Columbia, workers across the United States want, need and deserve a paid sick days standard. Currently, there is no federal law that guarantees workers in the United States the right to earn paid sick days.

- ▶ **At the national level, there is strong public support for universal access to paid sick days:** 85 percent of voters want employers to provide paid sick time.<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ The federal **Healthy Families Act (H.R. 932/S. 497)** would establish a national paid sick days standard, allowing workers in businesses with 15 or more employees to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year to be used to recover from their own illnesses, access preventive care, provide care to a sick family member, attend school meetings related to a child’s health condition or disability or seek assistance related to domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault. Workers in businesses with fewer than 15 employees would earn up to seven job-protected *unpaid* sick days each year to be used for the same reasons, unless their employers choose to offer paid sick days.

**People across the United States should have a fair shot at getting the care they need, caring for a child or assisting a loved one – no matter where they live or work. For more, visit [www.PaidSickDays.org](http://www.PaidSickDays.org).**

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1 National Partnership for Women & Families. (2015, April). *Paid Sick Days: Low Cost, High Reward for Workers, Employers and Communities*. Retrieved 8 July 2015, from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/paid-sick-days-low-cost-high-reward.pdf>

2 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015, July). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2015*. (Table 6). Retrieved 24 July 2015, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf> (Based on 39 percent of a private sector workforce of 112 million people)

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4 Peipins, L. A., Soman, A., Berkowitz, Z., & White, M. C. (2012). The lack of paid sick leave as a barrier to cancer screening and medical care-seeking: results from the National Health Interview Survey. *BMC public health*, 12(1), 520.

5 Schuster, M. A., & Chung, P. J. (2014). Time Off to Care for a Sick Child—Why Family-Leave Policies Matter. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 371(6), 493-495.

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7 Hill, H. D. (2013). Paid Sick Leave and Job Stability. *Work and occupations*, 40(2), 143-173.

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9 Branche, Y. (2013, June). *Audit of the Accrued Sick and Safe Leave Act of 2008*. Office of the District of Columbia Auditor. Retrieved 8 July 2015, from <http://dcauditor.org/sites/default/files/DCA092013.pdf>

10 New York Times and CBS News Poll. (2015, May). *Americans’ Views on Income Inequality and Workers’ Rights*. National telephone poll conducted with 1,022 adults on landlines and cellphones May 28-31, 2015, by the *New York Times* and *CBS News*. Retrieved 8 July 2015, from [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/03/business/income-inequality-workers-rights-international-trade-poll.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/03/business/income-inequality-workers-rights-international-trade-poll.html?_r=0)