

Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Testimony to Support SB 1130 & HB 3788
An Act Establishing Paid Sick Days
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Good morning Chairman Rodrigues, Chairman McGee and members of the Labor and Workforce Development Committee. My name is Dr. Alison Earle. I am a researcher and instructor at the Harvard School of Public Health. Thank you for having me here today. I am here to urge you to support the Paid Sick Days bill.

For the past ten years, I have conducted research with Dr. Jody Heymann on how working and social conditions affect the health and wellbeing of families. These studies have involved over 10,000 Americans across the country and across income and demographic groups, as well as focused studies on working parents in Massachusetts. This research has made one fact clear: One of the most important ways we can support working families' health and well-being is to ensure that they have paid sick leave.

Paid sick leave is critical to the health of Massachusetts working adults, their children and elderly relatives for several reasons. First, all working families must cope with common illnesses. More than one in three families must cope with 2 weeks or more each year when a family member is sick. Approximately one in four families face a family illness burden of three weeks or more each year.

Second, family support and care are key to maintaining the health of children and adult dependents. One of the most important factors affecting the health of children is whether their parents are available to be involved in their care. When parents participate in their care, sick children recover more rapidly from illnesses and injuries, have better outcomes from acute and chronic diseases, and their health care costs are lower because they spend less time in the hospital. Having sick leave is critical to parents' availability to care for their children's health. Many parents report that they often must go to work when their children are sick. Among parents who are able to stay at home with their sick children, more than half say they could do so because they received some type of paid leave.

Third, having paid leave is important for working adults caring for elderly, sick or disabled family members. Adults who receive support from family members have substantially better health outcomes from such major conditions as heart attacks and strokes.

Fourth, having paid sick leave for personal health needs is important for the health and economic security of workers. Paid sick leave allows workers to avoid spreading disease at the workplace, and to recover from and return to work after major illnesses. Paid sick leave has also been shown to enable workers to keep their jobs. This is particularly important given that personal and family health problems are a major cause of job loss.

Having a health problem led to a 53% increase in job loss among low-wage mothers and having a child with health problems, a 36% increase.

Lastly, paid sick leave plays a particularly critical role for low-income families. While many families in Massachusetts cannot reliably count on paid sick leave, working poor families and women who have left welfare for work are at highest risk. However, mothers who left welfare for work are significantly more likely than other mothers to have children with chronic conditions to care for and thus greater need for paid sick days.

Paid sick leave is essential to the health and economic productivity of the citizens of Massachusetts. The Paid Sick Days bill superbly constructed to help meet the essential needs of working adults and their families and at the same time is readily achievable. 139 countries globally - from rich to poor nations - provide paid sick leave to employees, and of these 116 countries provide paid leave for 10 or more days.

The Paid Sick Days bill will make an enormous difference to the health of children and adults alike. I urge you to support the Paid Sick Days bill. Thank you.