



March 11, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Adams, Ranking Member Byrne and Members of the Subcommittee on Workforce Protection:

On behalf of YWCA USA, an organization dedicated to eliminating racism and empowering women, I write to thank the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Workforce Protections for holding a hearing titled *The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784): Examining a Plan to Secure Paid Sick Leave for U.S. Workers* and accepting this letter for the hearing record.

We submit this letter today to emphasize the need for a national paid sick days standard, particularly for working women of color as well as survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and urge the Committee to consider the Health Families Act (H.R. 1784). If passed, the Healthy Families Act would provide eligible workers with seven paid sick days to help working individuals recover from short-term illnesses or balance the needs of working families. The Healthy Families Act is the legislative solution that working women and families, particularly in communities of color, need and we thank the Committee for discussing this important bill.

Particularly as our nation grapples with the growing coronavirus crisis, this hearing and the need for the Healthy Families Act is more critical than ever.

The need for paid sick days

At YWCA USA, we are doing the work of justice every day – through our advocacy, our leadership, and our on-the-ground work across America. We have been at the forefront of the most pressing social movements for more than 160 years – from voting rights to civil rights, from affordable housing to ensuring economic security for women and families. Today, we serve over 2 million women, girls and their families through a network of local YWCA associations in over 1,300 communities across 45 states and the District of Columbia.

YWCA's mission to empower women includes a dedication to improving women's health, security, and economic advancement. We believe that no one should have to choose between their livelihood and their health, their family, or their safety. Yet far too many women and families, particularly women and families of color, must make this choice every day. Today, women are a

primary source of financial support for many families and bear significant caretaking responsibilities at home. For example:

- Half of all households in the U.S. with children under age 18 have either a single mother who heads a household or a married mother who provides at least 40 percent of a family's earnings.ⁱ
- More than four in five Black mothers (81.1%), 67.1% of Native American mothers, and 52.5% of Latina mothers are breadwinners.ⁱⁱ Many of these women are raising families on their own (60.9% of Black mothers, 44.2% of Native American mothers, and 31.2% of Latina mothers)ⁱⁱⁱ
- More than four million African American families with children have a female head of household – most often a mother, grandmother or other relative who is her family's only source of financial support.^{iv} The same is true for nearly three million Latinx families.^v
- According to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Labor, women held more jobs than men in December 2019, a first in nearly a decade.^{vi} The report further highlighted that women were more prone to hold multiple jobs.^{vii} Today women earn on average 82 cents to a man's dollar and widens for women of color.^{viii} Despite this positive increase in representation of women in the workforce, the persistent pay gap compounds economic challenges for women and women of color, underscoring a need for action.

As a result of their dual roles as caregivers and primary breadwinners, many women in the workforce are often forced to choose between their family's economic security and their health when they or their loved ones need care. Today, almost one in three private sector employees do not have paid sick days to recover from short-term illnesses.^{ix} As a result, working parents without access to paid sick days are nearly twice as likely to send a sick child to school or day care to ensure attendance at work.^x They are also 2.5 times more likely to have been reported taking a child or family member to the emergency room because they were unable to take time off during their normal job hours to care for their loved one.^{xi} Job-protected paid sick days, such as those proposed in the Health Families Act, would allow workers to take incremental time away from work to attend to their and their family's health or pick up sick children from school. Without paid sick leave, missing a few days, or even just one day, of paid work can have significant economic consequences, particularly for women.

The lack of paid sick days also has a direct effect on survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Survivors often need to take time off from work to heal from traumatic experiences or attend medical appointments. While violence impacts all women and their ability to obtain and maintain economic independence, survivors of color face an even greater financial consequence

because they already experience lower wages, lower lifetime earnings, and other employment disparities.^{xii}

Most notably, paid sick days reduces community contagion and safely accommodates public health emergencies. Today, people without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely than those with paid sick days to report going to work with a contagious illness like the flu.^{xiii} These individuals often report to work sick out of fear of workplace discipline, losing their jobs for needing to take a sick day or the ongoing pressures of presenteeism in the workplace.

With the peak of flu season currently coinciding with the growing coronavirus pandemic around the world, access to paid sick days to rest and recover from short-term illnesses lessens the risk of contagion, making workplaces healthier and employees more productive.

Nonetheless, the need to provide paid sick days for employees can also be felt across all areas of employment, including the nonprofit sector. In particular, mission-driven nonprofits that provide human services and empower their employees to develop equitable work-life balance are often under resourced in both human and financial capital. The lack of a national paid sick days program for all has varying effects on different communities but the overall agreement on the need to take action to address this disparity is urgent.

Working women and families need paid sick time to care for their families

YWCA's recent bipartisan study, YWomenVote 2020, presents a comprehensive examination of women's concerns, priorities, and experiences. With its in-depth focus on women whose voices are critical yet frequently overlooked in policy discussions, YWomenVote 2020 frames clear expectations for legislative action that are held by women of color, Gen Z (age 18-22) and Millennial women (age 23-38), and white rural women.

Women today are worried about a broad range of health, safety, caregiving, and economic concerns that they and their families face. According to the study, almost half or more of women are worried about having access to paid time off from work to care for themselves or family members when sick and agree that Congress and the next President should address this issue.^{xiv} When disaggregating this number by race, the intensity of support for this issue is notably high among women of color. Most notably, Latinas are more worried about every concern tested when compared to women overall, showing particular concern (18% more than women overall) about paid time off from work to care for themselves or an ill family member.^{xv}

As we head into a historic 2020, women – particularly women of color – are primed to continue their unprecedented rise and will serve as a decisive voting block in local, state, and federal

elections across the country. The data is clear: women, particularly women of color, demand a legislative solution to help working individuals recover from illnesses and balance the needs of families. We urge Congress to take action and meet these demands.

Working women and families need The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784)

The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784) would establish a national paid sick days standard that would benefit working people and their families. This bill would:

- Allow employees in businesses with 15 or more workers to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year to be used to recover from their own illness, access preventative care, provide care to a sick family member, or attend school meetings related to a child's health condition or disability. Employers with less than 15 employees have the option of offering their workers paid sick days;
- Implement a simple method for calculating accrued sick time, allowing employees to earn a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked and a maximum of 56 hours (seven days) per year. The employer may also opt to increase the limit of paid sick time accrued;
- Allows survivors of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault the ability to use their accrued paid sick days to seek treatment or assistance related to the incident;
- Allow employers to implement certification policies if an employee uses more than three paid sick days in a row, including notification from law enforcement officers or survivor advocate in the case of survivors of domestic violence;
- Allow employers to maintain current policies so long as they continue to meet the minimum leave standards set by the Healthy Families Act.

Today, for an average family, 2.7 days of loss wages due to illness is equivalent to their entire monthly grocery budget. Similarly, 3.3 days of pay lost is equivalent to an average family's entire monthly health care budget. Paid sick days provide families with the economic security and peace-of-mind should illness effect themselves or their family. They reduce community contagion and decrease unnecessary health care costs by allowing time for preventative screenings and other medical care. Finally, paid sick days helps retain workers and reduce the high costs of turnover, such as advertising, interviewing and training new hires. The approach outlined by The Healthy Families Act builds upon the success of 11 state and 33 local paid sick days programs and has a demonstrated history of success.

A national paid sick days standard outlined in The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784) is crucial to securing the strength and vitality of working women and families, particularly communities of

color, as well as survivors across the country. We thank the Committee for investigating this critical issue and look forward to working with you to achieve this goal. Please do not hesitate to contact Pam Yuen, Government Relations Manager, at pyuen@ywca.org or 202-559-7022, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Alejandra Y. Castillo
Chief Executive Officer

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- ⁱ Institute for Women's Policy Research. (September 2016). Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State. Retrieved 10 January 2017 from: <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/breadwinner-mothers-by-race-ethnicity-and-state/> [hereinafter Breadwinner Mothers]
- ⁱⁱ Breadwinner Mothers, supra note i
- ⁱⁱⁱ Id.
- ^{iv} National Partnership for Women and Families. (September 2015). Women of Color Need A Paid Sick Days Standard. Retrieved 10 January 2017, from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/women-of-color-need-a-paid-sick-days-standard.pdf>.
- ^v Id.
- ^{vi} U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (January 2020). The Employment Situation – December 2019. Retrieved 27 January 2020 from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf?mod=article_inline&mod=article_inline.
- ^{vii} Id.
- ^{viii} American Association of University Women (AAUW). (September 2019). The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap. Retrieved 27 January 2020 from <https://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>.
- ^{ix} National Partnership for Women and Families. Everyone gets sick, but not everyone has time to get better. Retrieved 05 March 2020 from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/paid-sick-days.html>.
- ^x Id.
- ^{xi} Id.
- ^{xii} Center for American Progress. (April 2012). The Effects of Paid Family and Medical Leave on Employment Stability and Economic Security. Retrieved 10 January 2017 from <https://www.americanprogress.org/wpcontent/uploads/issues/2012/04/pdf/BousheyEmploymentLeave1.pdf>.
- ^{xiii} Smith, T. W., & Kim, J. (2010, June). Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences. National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for the Public Welfare Foundation Publication. Retrieved 20 February 2020 from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/ourwork/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-attitudes-and-experiences.pdf>.
- ^{xiv} YWCA USA. (December 2019). YWomenVote 2020. <https://ywomenvote.org/download-ywomenvote-2020/>.
- ^{xv} Id.