

Testimony in support of: H.187, Earned Sick Days
House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs, April 9, 2015
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Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (PPNNE) in support of House Bill 187. PPNNE urges the Vermont legislature to ensure that all Vermonters have access to paid sick days. Policies and laws in this country and in Vermont must reflect what the public understands to be true: a woman's reproductive health is critical to her economic health and stability and that of her family's.

For 50 years, PPNNE has been working to improve the health, safety, and economic security of women. We believe that requiring employers to provide workers with the right to earn paid sick days is crucial to removing barriers to women's health access and therefore, their economic opportunity. We have seen how the absence of paid leave exacerbates the work-family imbalance that women bear disproportionately as the primary caregivers of their families. And as a health care provider, we recognize daily the intersection of economic security and reproductive health.

As the state of Vermont's largest reproductive health care provider, we are very supportive of this legislation because it promotes sound public health policy and increases access to health care services. We are proud to have 12 health centers across the state and employ over 120 people in Vermont. In 2014, our health center staff saw almost 17,000 patients and had over 25,000 visits. More than 7 in 10 patients who access care through a women's health center consider it their primary source of health care, and we provided a wide range of primary and preventative care services, including annual exams, screening for cervical, breast, ovarian, uterine, testicular, and colorectal cancer. Access to these often time-sensitive services that we provide should not be forsaken out of fear of retaliation from an employer or result in lost wages

Our doors are open to everyone regardless of their immigration status, gender, or ability to pay. We accept insurance plans and we assist uninsured Vermonters in enrolling in state health care programs. In 2013, 59% of our patients were at 100% of the federal poverty level or below, 91% were at 200%. We see our patients make difficult decisions about how to best manage resources to care for themselves and their families every single day.

This bill is particularly important for low-income Vermonters who often do not have adequate access to health care and no opportunities for paid time off. We know that many of our patients often delay important medical visits due to their inability to take paid time off leading to more medical problems and increased costs down the road. A newly-discovered lump in a breast or the beginning pain of a urinary tract infection are just two examples of medical concerns that are time-sensitive, and that left unchecked can turn into serious, even life-threatening, medical conditions.

The Vermonters who currently lack paid sick days resemble our patients— young women, working mothers, and low-income Vermonters. We know that paid sick days are especially critical for single

working mothers, a group of Vermonters who face impossible choices between taking home a full paycheck and caring for themselves and their children. Access to paid sick days would prevent a woman from having to decide between her health and her livelihood.

Access to reproductive health and birth control is a critical economic issue for women. More women than ever have entered the workforce, thanks in large part to expanded access to birth control, which has allowed women to pursue their education and careers. Unfortunately, workplace leave policies haven't kept up with this progress.

What does paid sick leave have to do with women's health and economic rights? A lot:

- Women are the primary breadwinners in [40 percent](#) of American households with children. That's a lot of families who depend on women's jobs.
- [70 percent](#) of low-wage workers receive no paid sick days and often must go to work sick in industries that could endanger public health, such as food service.
- [23 percent](#) of all adults in the United States have lost or were threatened with losing their job for taking time off due to illness or to care for a sick child/relative.
- A 2012 University of Michigan study found that fully one-third of the wage gains women have made since the 1960s are the result of access to oral contraceptives. This study also found that the decrease in the gap among 25–49-year-olds between men's and women's annual incomes "would have been 10 percent smaller in the 1980s and 30 percent smaller in the 1990s" in the absence of widespread legal birth control access.
- Additional studies have found that access to contraception contributed significantly to more young women obtaining at least some college education and to more college-educated women pursuing advanced professional degrees.
- Highlighting the fact that birth control is a top economic driver for women, Bloomberg Businessweek recently listed contraception as one of the most transformational developments in the business sector in the last 85 years.

The economic security of women and families is directly tied to a woman's access to reproductive health care. As United States Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in 1992, "The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives."

Access to reproductive health care access is just as important the economic discussion as job security, equal pay, and college affordability.

For these reasons, PPNNE enthusiastically supports H.187. It is time for state lawmakers to stand up for hard-working families and put in place workplace policies, including paid sick days, that all Vermont workers—and especially working women and their families—need. This bill is common sense and it’s the right thing to do. All women and families deserve workforce protections that will help them succeed at home and at work.