

**Testimony of Cary Brown, Executive Director of the Vermont Commission on Women
House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs
April 9, 2015**

RE: H.187, an act relating to absence from work for health care and safety

Women are disproportionately impacted by a lack of paid sick days. They are **over-represented in low-wage jobs**, which are less likely to offer paid sick days, **they assume more of the responsibilities for care of children** and other family members, and **they are more likely to be the victims of domestic and sexual violence** and to need access to the services that can help keep them safe and in the workforce.

Women are disproportionately affected by lack of paid sick days because they are more likely than men to work part-time and to be in low-wage jobs.

- In 2011, 27 percent of employed women usually worked part time—that is, fewer than 35 hours per week. In comparison, 11 percent of employed men usually worked part time.¹
- One strategy about half of married couples use to help manage their overall work and family responsibilities is to have one parent, typically the mother, cut back the time they spend in the paid workforce. However, approximately three-fourths of married mothers who work part-time still miss work when their child is sick, and only 29 percent have access to paid sick days.²
- 82% of workers making the minimum wage don't have access to paid sick days, and 62% of those workers are women.³
- In 2010, the working-poor rate (the ratio of the working poor to all individuals in the labor force for at least 27 weeks) was higher for women than for men—7.6 percent, compared with 6.7 percent.⁴
- In Vermont, over 40% of all single mothers are living at or below the poverty level, and almost 60% of single mothers with children under 5 are living in poverty.⁵
- Women at the lower end of the economic scale are more impacted by a lack of paid sick time, as they are hit with the double blow of more child care responsibilities and less paid time off. More than half of women in low-wage and part-time jobs report that they have to take time off when their children are sick, compared to about a third of women in higher-wage and full-time jobs, who are more likely to have help with childcare.⁶

¹U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Women in the Labor Force: a Databook." Report 1040, February 2013.

² Kristin Smith & Andrew Schaefer, "Who Cares for the Sick Kids? Parents' Access to Paid Sick Time to Care for a Sick Child." Carsey Institute, Issue Brief No. 51, Spring 2012.

³ Women in Poverty: An American Crisis. Stories from the 2014 Shriver Report.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/specialreport/shriverreport>

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Women in the Labor Force: a Databook." Report 1040, February 2013.

⁵ Public Assets Institute, "State of Working Vermont 2014"

⁶ Usha Ranji & Alina Salganicoff. "Data Note: Balancing on Shaky Ground: Women, Work and Family Health," The Henry J. Kaiser Family Institute, 2014.

- Vermont women who lose work time due to domestic violence are much more likely to work in industries that do not provide paid sick days: in one study almost half of them worked in food service or personal care industries.⁷ Nationally, these industries provide paid sick days to less than a third of workers.⁸

Because women bear the majority of caregiving responsibilities in families, working women are disproportionately impacted by a lack of paid sick days.

Access to paid sick days is particularly important for working women because of the double burden they face – both care for themselves and care for an ill child or an aging relative.

Caring for children:

- 74 percent of all employed mothers report staying home from work when their child is sick, compared to 40 percent of all employed fathers.⁹
- Being married does not offset this imbalance: Among married mothers employed full-time who have a spouse working full-time, 73 percent miss work when their child is sick, compared to 40 percent of full-time working fathers with a full-time working spouse.¹⁰
- Over three quarters of mothers assume primary responsibility in the family for their children's health care, including taking their children to doctor's appointments and ensuring that they receive the care they need.¹¹
- Two-thirds of school-aged children miss at least one school day a year because of illness or injury, and nearly one-fifth miss more than a week.¹²
- 60% of working mothers who do stay home with children when they are sick report that they do not get paid when they take time off from work. This percentage is rising; in 2004 just 45% of mothers reported not being paid when they missed work.¹³
- 49% of women report that they have lost pay or promotions or have struggled to keep their jobs because of the need to care for sick children, while only 28% of men report the same.¹⁴
- Job losses among low-income American women are most frequently reported to be the result of the birth or illness of a child.¹⁵

Caring for aging relatives:

- Women make up more than 2/3's of adults providing substantial assistance to aging parents¹⁶, averaging 23 hours a week providing care.¹⁷

⁷ Schmidt M, Barnett A. Effects of Domestic Violence on the Workplace: A Vermont survey of male offenders enrolled in batterer intervention programs. Burlington, Vermont. : Vermont Council of Domestic Violence; Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont; Spectrum Youth & Family Services, Violence Intervention & Prevention Programs; January 30 2012.

⁸ Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2014, July). Paid Sick Days Access Varies by Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, and Job Characteristics.

⁹ Kristin Smith & Andrew Schaefer, "Who Cares for the Sick Kids? Parents' Access to Paid Sick Time to Care for a Sick Child." Carsey Institute, Issue Brief No. 51, Spring 2012.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Usha Ranji & Alina Salganicoff. "Data Note: Balancing on Shaky Ground: Women, Work and Family Health," The Henry J. Kaiser Family Institute, 2014

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Forbes, U.S. Far Behind in Workers' Rights, 2009

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Richard W. Johnson and Joshua M. Wiener, "A Profile of Frail Older Americans and their Caregivers," Urban Institute, The Retirement Project Occasional Paper Number 8, February 2006 Table

- Women who provide care to aging parents curtail their hours of paid work by an average of 43% in order to provide this care.¹⁸
- We can expect that this will be a growing issue, because the population in Vermont is aging more rapidly than in the rest of the country. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of Vermonters over the age of 65 grew by 17.5%, compared to 15.1% nationally, and compared to a growth of just 2.8% in the total population of the state.¹⁹

Caring for their own health care needs:

- There are an estimated 4,400 births and adoptions each year to women employed in Vermont, and about 800 of these women currently lack paid vacation and sick leave.²⁰

Women are more likely to be the victims of domestic and sexual violence, and to experience adverse effects at work as a consequence of that violence.

- 1 in 4 women have been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner compared to 1 in 7 men.²¹
- Approximately 37% of women seeking injury-related treatment in hospital emergency rooms were there because of injuries inflicted by a current or former spouse or partner.²²
- In the U.S., 1 in 5 women will be raped at some point in their lives, compared to 1 in 71 men.²³
- In Vermont, it has been estimated that 1 out of 7 adult women has been a victim of rape sometime in her lifetime.²⁴
- In Vermont, about 28% of victims of domestic and sexual violence take time off from work because of their experience of violence.²⁵
- One study in Vermont reported that victims of domestic violence lost an average of 10 work days per year, with 87% of those lost days being unpaid. Victims take time off for their own physical health care needs, but also for related reasons such as to attend court, legal meetings, and counseling, and to relocate to avoid further violence.²⁶
- Nationally, about 8 million days of paid work in a year are lost due to intimate partner violence.²⁷ 56% of victims report being late to work because of interference from their batterers²⁸, and between 25% and 50% report losing a job because of the violence.²⁹

¹⁷ Charles R. Pierret, "The 'sandwich generation': women caring for parents and children," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 2006, Table 2

¹⁸ Richard W. Johnson and Joshua M. Wiener, "A Profile of Frail Older Americans and their Caregivers," Urban Institute, The Retirement Project Occasional Paper Number 8, February 2006 Table

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Briefs. The Older Population: 2010.

²⁰ Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Valuing Good Health in Vermont: The Costs and Benefits of Earned Health Care Time." Briefing Paper #B320, April 2013.

²¹ The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010.

²² Rand, M. Violence-Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Room Departments; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997.

²³ 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

²⁴ 2003. Rape in Vermont: A Report to the State, Kilpatrick and Ruggiero.

²⁵ Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Valuing Good Health in Vermont: The Costs and Benefits of Earned Health Care Time." Briefing Paper #B320, April 2013.

²⁶ Schmidt M, Barnett A. Effects of Domestic Violence on the Workplace: A Vermont survey of male offenders enrolled in batterer intervention programs. Burlington, Vermont. : Vermont Council of Domestic Violence; Center for Rural Studies, University of Vermont; Spectrum Youth & Family Services, Violence Intervention & Prevention Programs; January 30 2012.

²⁷ Cost of intimate partner violence against women in the United States. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control;2003.

²⁸ Swanberg, J., & Logan, T. (2005). Domestic violence and employment: A qualitative study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10(1), 3-17.

- Also nationally, one in eight victims of stalking reported having lost time from work due to the stalking, because of fear for their safety, having to get a restraining order, or having to testify in court.³⁰
- A 2015 health impact assessment on paid sick days legislation conducted by the Vermont Department of Health noted the impact of paid sick days on the ability of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking to access services.³¹ The report recommended that any such legislation includes coverage for individuals seeking these services.

Access to paid time for health care and safety would help working women more securely balance their ability to care for their families and ensure their own economic stability and self-sufficiency.

²⁹ Lloyd, S. & Taluc, N. (1999). The effect of male violence on female employment. *Violence Against Women*, 5(4), 370-92.

³⁰ Baum K, Catalano S, Rand M, Rose K. *Stalking Victimization in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Justice Programs; January 2009.

³¹ Vermont Department of Health. *A Health Impact Assessment of Paid Sick Leave in Vermont*. February 2015.