

**To:** Representative Head and members of House General, Housing and Military Affairs Committee  
**Re:** Testimony in support of H.187 – An Act Relating to Absence from Work for Health Care and Safety.  
**Date:** April 9, 2015

### **Working Families Need Paid Sick Days**

My position is housed with Voices for Vermont's Children, and our mission is to promote public policy that enhances the lives of children and youth. We support workplace policies that improve the well-being of our state's children, and H.187 certainly qualifies. 72% of children under 12 in Vermont live in households where all adults work outside the home.<sup>1</sup> The passage of H.187 will have a profound stabilizing effect on the thousands of children whose parents currently find themselves forced to choose between staying home to care for them when they are ill and missing a paycheck or worse – losing their job.

On average, school-age children miss at least 3 school days per year for health reasons. Younger children have even higher rates of illness.<sup>2</sup> When parents cannot care for sick children and they must attend child care or school, it takes a toll on the health of the child, other children, and teachers and child care providers. Without access to paid time off, parents may postpone or skip the well child visits recommended by physicians, and may interrupt vaccination series or other necessary treatment. The University of Vermont College of Medicine and the Peace and Justice Center conducted a study of elementary schools in four Vermont counties (Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, Washington) and concluded that parents with at least 3 paid sick days per year were 15% more likely to have taken their child to see the doctor in the past year than those with fewer than 3 days of paid time (87% vs. 72%)<sup>3</sup>

Supporting parents in their dual roles as employees and caregivers yields economic benefits as well. Studies show that children recover more quickly when cared for by their parents. When children have a faster recovery time, health care expenditures are reduced.<sup>4</sup> The mere presence of parents shortens children's hospital stays by 31 percent, and active parental involvement in children's hospital care may head off future health care needs.

Parents' report that paid leave is the primary factor in their decisions about staying home when their children are sick. Parents with sick time or vacation time were 5 times as likely to care for their sick children as those who didn't have these benefits.<sup>5</sup> Why do we tolerate for one minute pitting a child's health against the economic security of the child's family? And since I don't believe you will be hearing testimony from advocates for elders, I'd like to point out that the same arguments hold for older adults who rely upon family caregivers to age in place with dignity. It's time to support families in their quest to balance their responsibilities as caregivers with their obligations as employees for the good of our kids, our elders, and our communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center, accessed on 11/3/13 at:  
<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5053-children-age-6-to-12-with-all-available-parentsin-the-labor-force>.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Vicky Lovell, No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers when Workers Don't have Paid Sick Leave, Institute for Women's Policy Research, May 2004, using data from Bloom, Cohen, Vickerie and Wondimu, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The Impact of Paid Sick Days on Public Health in an Elementary School Population, UVM College of Medicine and the Peace and Justice Center (2005).

<sup>4</sup> S.J Heymann, Alison Earle and Brain Egleston, 1996, as cited in Lovell, Paid Sick Days Improve Public Health by Reducing the Spread of Disease, Institute for Women's Policy research, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Jody Heymann, 'The Widening gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy – and What Can Be Done About It, Basic Books, 2000 Palmer, 1993, as cited in Lovell, No Time to be Sick, 2004

## **The Economy & the Social Contract**

Several businesses have testified about their philosophical and bottom-line motivations for supporting paid sick days, so I won't belabor the point. I've submitted a memo that summarizes the research around the implementation of paid sick time policies in a number of cities and states around the country. In short, this policy is good for everyone. The VT Paid Sick Days Coalition has gone to great lengths to address the main concerns expressed by some in the business community to make the bill more palatable. Our members are deeply invested in the vitality of our communities as a whole, which naturally includes our businesses.

The Vermont Dept. of Labor published a forecast of the fastest growing jobs by industry through 2016, and the trends reflected in that report are likely to continue. The second highest growth was predicted in personal care workers. Restaurant, hospitality and food service were also trending at rates far above the average.<sup>6</sup> These are the very jobs that generally do not provide paid sick time, offer wages below a livable standard, and are typically held by women. We need to deal with the reality of our economy. As we increase restrictions on public benefits and ratchet up work requirements, we need everyone to participate in building pathways from poverty through dignified, fairly compensated work.

There has been a suggestion that more education will help employers see the benefits of providing paid sick days and move them toward voluntary adoption of this policy. Advocates have been providing this information for a decade. Businesses that are going to come around voluntarily have done so, and 80% of Vermont's workforce is benefiting from their foresight. But just as with child labor, desegregation, and overtime, some employers only respond to the establishment of minimum standards. The 60,000 working Vermonters who don't enjoy this common-sense minimum standard are tired of waiting. They are looking to their representatives to rectify this unsustainable and inequitable situation. Thank you.

Michelle Fay  
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Voices for Vermont's Children

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<sup>6</sup> Vermont Department of Health, Economic and Labor Market Information, accessed on April 4, 2015 at: <http://www.vtلمي.info/projst.pdf>