

**Testimony of Cary Brown, Executive Director of the Vermont Commission on Women  
Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs  
January 21, 2016**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. The Vermont Commission on Women has been working for pay equity and economic security for women in Vermont for over 50 years, and I'd like to share some information with you today about the connection between these issues and earned time off for the care and safety of themselves and their families.

Women are disproportionately impacted by a lack of earned sick leave. They are **over-represented in part-time and low-wage jobs**, which are less likely to offer paid sick leave, **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 in Vermont are disproportionately affected by lack of paid sick leave because they are more likely than men to work part-time and to be in low-wage jobs.**

- 25 percent of women in Vermont who work are working part-time. In comparison, only 10 percent of Vermont men work-part-time.<sup>1</sup>
- Even among full-time workers, women in Vermont are more highly concentrated at the lower end of the wage scale: 17% of women working full-time in Vermont are making hourly wages of less than \$10.10 an hour. 43% of women in Vermont who are working full-time are not making enough to meet the basic expenses to support themselves and their families, as defined by the 2015 Basic Needs Budget figures developed by Vermont's Joint Fiscal Office.<sup>2</sup>
- Nationally, 82% of workers making \$8.25 per hour or less (most of whom are women) don't have access to paid sick days. (62% of minimum wage jobs are held by women).<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2011-2013

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Public Use Microdata Sample; American Community Survey 5 Year Data Release (2009-2013)

<sup>3</sup> Women in Poverty: An American Crisis. Stories from the 2014 Shriver Report.  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/specialreport/shriverreport>

<sup>4</sup> Usha Ranji & Alina Salganicoff. "Data Note: Balancing on Shaky Ground: Women, Work and Family Health," The Henry J. Kaiser Family Institute, 2014.

- 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.<sup>5</sup>
- Vermont women who lose work time due to domestic violence are much more likely to work in industries that do not provide paid sick leave: in one study over half of them worked in food service or personal care industries.<sup>6</sup> Nationally, these industries provide paid sick leave to less than a third of workers.<sup>7</sup>

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

Access to paid sick leave 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:

- Nationally, 82% of women who work part-time say that they do so for reasons such as non-economic reasons (meaning not because they can't find full-time employment, but for reasons such as caring for family members, disability or health issues).<sup>8</sup>
- Women are nine times more likely than men to cite family care issues as the reasons why they work part-time.<sup>9</sup>
- 74 percent of all employed mothers report staying home from work when their child is sick, compared to 40 percent of all employed fathers.<sup>10</sup>
- 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.<sup>11</sup>
- 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.<sup>12</sup>
- 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.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2014, July). Paid Sick Days Access Varies by Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, and Job Characteristics.

<sup>8</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics: Table 22: Persons at work in nonagricultural industries by age, sex, race Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, marital status and usual full- or part-time status (2014)

<sup>9</sup> The Status of Women in the States: 2015. Cynthia Hess, PhD, Jessica Milli, PhD, Jeff Hayes, PhD, and Ariane Hegewisch, M.Phil. with Yana Mayayeva, Stephanie Roman, Julie Anderson, MA, and Justine Augeri IWPR, p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Usha Ranji & Alina Salganicoff. "Data Note: Balancing on Shaky Ground: Women, Work and Family Health," The Henry J. Kaiser Family Institute, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

- 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.<sup>14</sup>
- 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.<sup>15</sup>
- Job losses among low-income American women are most frequently reported to be the result of the birth or illness of a child.<sup>16</sup>

#### Caring for aging relatives:

- Women make up more than 2/3's of adults providing substantial assistance to aging parents<sup>17</sup>, averaging 23 hours a week providing care.<sup>18</sup>
- Women who provide care to aging parents curtail their hours of paid work by an average of 43% in order to provide this care.<sup>19</sup>
- 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.<sup>20</sup>

#### 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.<sup>21</sup>

#### **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.<sup>22</sup>
- 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.<sup>23</sup>
- In the U.S., 1 in 5 women will be raped at some point in their lives, compared to 1 in 71 men.<sup>24</sup>
- In Vermont, it has been estimated that 1 out of 7 adult women has been a victim of rape sometime in her lifetime.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Forbes, U.S. Far Behind in Workers' Rights, 2009

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> 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

<sup>18</sup> Charles R. Pierret, "The 'sandwich generation': women caring for parents and children," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 2006, Table 2

<sup>19</sup> 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

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Briefs. The Older Population: 2010.

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Rand, M. Violence-Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Room Departments; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> 2011 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

<sup>25</sup> 2003. Rape in Vermont: A Report to the State, Kilpatrick and Ruggiero.

- In Vermont, it's estimated that there are about 224 individuals who are victims of domestic violence and do not have access to paid leave of any kind. About 28% of victims of violence take time off from work because of their experience of violence, so it's estimated that about 70 additional people would use paid leave if they had access to it.<sup>26</sup>
- 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.<sup>27</sup>
- Nationally, about 8 million days of paid work in a year are lost due to intimate partner violence.<sup>28</sup> 56% of victims report being late to work because of interference from their batterers<sup>29</sup>, and between 25% and 50% report losing a job because of the violence.<sup>30</sup>
- 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.<sup>31</sup>

**Vermont families, and Vermont's economy, are dependent on women's earnings, and on women being able to meet their work responsibilities even as they shoulder a greater share of family responsibilities.**

- Vermont women participate in the labor force at a higher rate than the national average, and much closer to that of Vermont men than the national average. Women and men in Vermont are in the labor force at almost the same rate: 66% for women and 69% for men, and for both it peaks during the child-rearing years. Women ages 25-44 are working at rates from 81 – 84 percent.<sup>32</sup>
- Women contribute at least 40% of the income in a third of Vermont's families.<sup>33</sup>
- 76% of women who maintain families in Vermont are working.<sup>34</sup>

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

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<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> Swanberg, J., & Logan, T. (2005). Domestic violence and employment: A qualitative study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 10(1), 3-17.

<sup>30</sup> Lloyd, S. & Taluc, N. (1999). The effect of male violence on female employment. *Violence Against Women*, 5(4), 370-92.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2011-2013

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Public Use Microdata Sample; American Community Survey 5 year data release (2009-2013)

<sup>34</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014