



January 28, 2014

To: Senator Mullin and Members of the Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs Committee

Re: Testimony in support of S.15 – An Act Relating to Absence from Work for Health Care and Safety.

The mission of Voices for Vermont's Children 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. S.15 is just such a policy. The passage of S.15 would mean that thousands more of our state's children will live in families whose parents can stay home and care for them when they are ill without losing income vital to the support of the family. This is the kind of workplace benefit emphasized by President Obama in his recent State of the Union speech. This is the kind of public policy that elevates the well-being of our children.

We all know that children get sick. On average, school-age children miss at least 3 school days per year due to health reasons. Younger children have even higher rates of illness.¹

Studies show that children recover faster when cared for by their parents. When children have a faster recovery time, health care expenditures are reduced.² 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 child care providers.

Without access to paid leave, 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 throughout four counties in Vermont and concluded that the likelihood that a child saw a doctor in the past year if their parents had more than 3 paid sick days was at least 87%. Conversely, if the family rarely or never had a parent at home and had 3 or fewer paid sick days, their child had a well child check up only 72% of the time. Families with fewer paid sick days indicated greater difficulty in taking children to physician visits than those that had more than 3 paid sick days.³

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.

² 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.

³ *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).

When hospitals include parents in children's care, the length of their stay is shorter. The mere presence of parents shortens children's hospital stays by 31 percent. Active parental involvement in children's hospital care may head off future health care needs.⁴

Parent's report that paid leave is the primary factor in their decisions about staying home when their children are sick. Parents with sick leave or vacation leave were 5 times as likely to care for their sick children as those who didn't have these benefits.⁵

Why do we, the richest nation on earth, tolerate for one minute pitting a child's health against the economic security of the child's family? For the 75% of Vermont children ages 6-12 with all available parents in the labor force, let's provide this basic workplace benefit.⁶ Let's make sure that there is a parent available when their child most needs them.

Respectfully submitted,

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⁴ Kristensson-Hallstrom, Elander and Malmfors, 1997, as cited in Lovell, *No Time to be Sick, 2004*. 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*.

⁵ Jody Heymann, 'The Widening Gap'.

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