

Voices
for Vermont's Children



January 20, 2016

To: The Senate Committee on Economic Development

Re: Testimony on H. 187 Healthy Workplaces Bill

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Good Morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Annie Accettella and I am the Campaign Director for the Paid Sick Days Coalition at Voices for Vermont's Children. Our goal at Voices is to improve the well-being of children and youth, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. We seek to ensure that public policies address inequities so that all children thrive.

So I will get right to the point. The issue we have before us is that, according to Vermont Department of Labor data, only about half of Vermont's private sector employers currently provide paid leave to their employees. As much as 20% of Vermont's workforce does not have access to any paid leave.¹ This means that approximately 60,000 Vermonters do not have any paid time off.²

We believe that all children need their parents and caregivers to have access to paid sick leave. 72% of children under 12 in Vermont live in households where all adults work outside the home.³ The passage of H.187 will have a profound stabilizing effect on the thousands of children whose parents currently find

¹ Vermont Department of Labor 2013 Fringe Benefit Study, accessed on Jan 19, 2016, at: <http://www.vtlmi.info/2013FringeBenefitStudy.pdf>

² Valuing Good Health in Vermont: The Costs and Benefits of Earned Health Care Time, The Institute for Women's Policy Research (2013).

³ 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>.

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.⁴ 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 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)⁵

We recognize that it is not just younger children who are affected by a lack of paid sick time. Older children often stay home from school to care for younger siblings or other family members needing care so that a parent can attend work without missing pay. Amy Lester a high school guidance counselor has often told the story of a young man who was repeatedly absent from school. She found out that this high school student was staying home to care for his younger siblings when they were sick or sent home from school. He worked extra hard to graduate, but eventually decided that he must postpone going to college because leaving his little brothers and sisters alone while his dad worked without paid leave was not possible.

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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).

expenditures are reduced.⁶ To that end, 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 stay home and care for their sick children as those who didn't have these benefits.⁷

It's time to support families in their quest to balance their responsibilities as caregivers with their obligations as employees.

⁶ S.J Heymann, Alison Earle and Brian 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.

⁷ 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