

11-07

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Paid Sick Leave

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports federal, state, and local legislation that would require employers to provide paid sick leave for their employees as a basic employee right.<sup>1</sup>

#### Justification

Studies indicate that paid sick leave has positive health and economic impacts on communities and is essential to well being.<sup>2</sup> Paid sick leave laws increase the likelihood of employees complying with public health directives to stay home when sick or keep children home when sick.<sup>13-14</sup> According to a 2009 Health Impact Assessment of federal legislation requiring employers with more than 15 employees to provide paid sick leave, offering paid sick leave is highly likely to increase the number of workers taking needed leave to care for themselves, receive preventive care, or care for ill children or dependents.<sup>2</sup> Federal legislation has also included provisions for individuals to use paid sick time to access medical and other support services after a sexual assault or due to domestic violence. A 2010 economic impact assessment of this legislation found that paid sick leave can reduce employers' overall costs while simultaneously contributing to the health of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

Employees without paid sick days are more than twice as likely to use emergency services as those with paid sick days, and often use these costly services rather than seeking preventive, routine care.<sup>4</sup> Further, encouraging employees to stay home while sick has been shown to decrease the spread of infectious diseases like the pandemic flu.<sup>5,7</sup> These findings are echoed in a recent research brief on lack of paid sick leave during the COVID-19 pandemic among the private sector workforce, retail employees and part-time workers, which found that lack of paid sick leave has had a direct adverse impact on the severity and duration of the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> Those who work in service jobs like restaurants, nursing homes, and childcare settings are a few examples of professionals who work directly with the public but often do not have access to earn paid sick leave. These are also professions that disproportionately employ an aging population that's more vulnerable to sickness and disease, and who are more likely to be caregivers to others.<sup>8</sup> Black and Hispanic parents are most likely to be in a job that doesn't offer paid sick leave, introducing further health inequities to both parents and children across racial and ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the need for paid sick leave in order to protect the health of individuals and communities.<sup>10</sup> Essential workers who could not work remotely were disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and people of color, which helped contribute to



inequities across racial and ethnic groups in cases and deaths seen throughout the pandemic. One study demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic increased paid sick leave coverage for restaurant workers at a chain which decreased incidences of working while sick.<sup>11</sup> Not only does a lack of paid sick leave impact the spread of infectious diseases, it also increases stress and negative mental health impacts that come from worrying about working while sick or while others are sick, and not being able to care for family members that need support.<sup>12</sup>

Many states have passed statewide laws to require paid sick leave benefits. Since implementing the law in 2011, Connecticut's leisure and hospitality sector, that most affected by the law, has experienced constant growth in employment rates. In cities where mandatory paid sick leave is required, like Washington, DC and San Francisco, employers report substantial benefits including workforce stability, lower turn-over, lower healthcare costs, increased productivity, and disease prevention.<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that working sick costs the national economy \$160 billion annually in lost productivity, which is greater than the estimated national cost of paid sick days.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, paid sick days can decrease the amount of turnover in a business, while the process of replacing workers can cost anywhere from 25 to 200 percent of annual compensation.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the positive benefits to both individuals and employers, nearly 32 percent of private industry employees lack access to paid sick leave.<sup>6</sup> Further, part-time and low-wage workers are disproportionately burdened by lack of this benefit. With only 35 percent of these positions having access to paid sick leave, they are faced with the difficult choice between going to work sick (or sending children to school or daycare sick) or losing income or job security.<sup>6</sup> In the case of severe disease outbreak or seasonal influenza, these workers have an economic disincentive to follow public health recommendations to minimize contact with the public and are likely to work while sick, creating health and economic risks for all.

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### **Record of Action**

*Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors November 2011*

*Updated December 2014*

*Updated May 2018*

*Updated February 2022*