

**Comments on Raised Bill S.B. No. 913, *An Act Mandating Employers
Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees.***

Prepared April 2, 2011

The Connecticut Public Health Association (CPHA) supports **S.B. 913, *An Act Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees.*** S.B. 913 will require that employers with fifty or more employees offer paid sick leave to certain employees when the employee or the employee's child, parent or spouse is ill, or when the employee has to deal with sexual assault or family violence issues.

The Connecticut Public Health Association's (CPHA) mission is to represent and unite the diverse expertise of Connecticut's public health professionals, to ameliorate the most pressing public health issues in the state, and to promote health and safe living for the people of Connecticut. [1] Therefore, CPHA supports the proposed legislation on paid sick leave because providing employees with paid sick days will keep us all healthier and more productive.

Background

Employers who encourage their employees to work while sick (and withholding pay if the employee does not work sick certainly does this) is bad for public health. Employees who do not have paid sick days are likely to work in the very jobs that affect the health of people everywhere: employees who bag our groceries, drive our kids to school, and serve our food in restaurants are just a few examples. In the food service industry, nearly 80% of employees -- cooks, food preparers, waiters and dishwashers alike -- lack paid sick time.

A new study published in the Journal of Food Protection found that about one out of every eight restaurant workers reported going to work while ill at least twice in the previous year, with symptoms including vomiting and diarrhea. Restaurant patrons who come home from dinner out with aches or nausea may think of it as "food poisoning." Most of the time, what they are experiencing is a type of easily transmittable food-borne virus called a 'norovirus'. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates there are 23 million 'norovirus' infections annually in America. Roughly, half of those infections are attributable to ill food workers preparing and serving our food.

The problem is not just limited to food service. According to one study in the American Journal of Epidemiology, patients in nursing homes providing paid sick days were 60% less likely to contract respiratory or gastrointestinal infections than those in nursing homes without paid sick days. Another study found that if an employee goes to work with the flu, they are likely to infect 2 out of every 10 coworkers. Another study

During the swine flu outbreak of 2009, President Obama, Governor Rell and public health officials at every level warned us to stay home if we caught the virus. However, for workers without paid sick days, the choice was not always so easy. Eight million Americans came to work with H1N1. In doing so, they spread the illness to 7 million of their coworkers.

Recommendations

CPHA strongly supports the proposed paid sick leave legislation. Guaranteeing employees access to paid sick days will not eliminate these problems, but it will certainly help. This proposal addresses a serious public health concern and is long overdue.

For additional information on CPHA's position on the paid sick days and other public health issues, please contact Katharine Lewis at 860-768-5464, e-mail kalewis@hartford.edu or Alison Gilcreast at 860-395-9202, e-mail sailing395@comcast.net

References

1. Connecticut Public Health Association. (2011). Mission. Retrieved from <http://www.cpha.info/index.cfm>
2. Everybody Benefits. (2011). 4 Big reasons to support paid sick days. Connecticut Campaign for Paid Sick Days.