



New Jersey Time to Care Coalition

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EARNED SICK DAYS

A Basic Workplace Standard for New Jersey

When workers get sick they need time to get well. It's just common sense. But in New Jersey, some 1.2 million workers – that's more than 1 in 3 of us – do not earn paid sick days. Many of these workers are in low-wage service jobs. They care for our children and the elderly. They prepare and serve food in our restaurants. They can't afford to stay home, even if they're sick. An earned sick days' policy would boost our families, our community and our economy.

Currently, no federal or state law guarantees workers access to earned sick & safe days when they or their families are sick, or when they need to deal with medical, legal or relocation issues related to domestic violence or sexual assault. Earned sick days' ordinances have been passed in Newark, Jersey City, East Orange, Irvington, Passaic, Paterson, Montclair and Trenton New Jersey; New York City, New York; Portland and Eugene Oregon; San Francisco, San Diego, and Oakland California; Seattle, Washington; Washington, D.C.; and the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts and California

Earned sick days strengthen New Jersey's economy

When working families have enough money in their pockets to cover the basics, that helps the whole economy. Losing a day's wages -- or worse, a job -- undermines a family's ability to contribute to the economy and forces many to rely on public programs to stay afloat.

Many NJ business owners have already spoken out in favor of earned sick days because they know it's not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. Businesses that provide paid sick days to workers to recover from an illness or care for a sick family member benefit from workers' increased commitment and productivity – a win-win situation for all!

- Earned sick days result in reduced turnover, which saves businesses money. Replacing and retraining a worker can cost up to 200% of a worker's annual compensation.
- A 2007 study by the Society of Human Resources Management showed that employee "presenteeism" (when employees go to work sick) cost employers \$180 billion annually compared to only \$118 billion a year for employee absenteeism.
- Economies in places like San Francisco have improved after enacting earned sick day policies, including higher job growth than neighboring communities.

Earned sick days strengthen New Jersey's families

Every family wants what's best for their children. Without access to earned sick days, many parents are forced to choose between their child's health and their family's financial stability. Earned sick days make it easier to be a good employee and a good parent.

- Parents with earned sick days are 20% less likely to send sick children to school.
- Nearly one quarter of US adults have been fired or threatened with job loss for taking time off to recover from an illness or caring for a dependent.

"Providing families with time to care means strong families, strong workplaces, and strong communities."

Earned sick days protect the public health

Many workers without earned sick days are in low-wage service jobs, caring for vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly, or preparing and serving food in restaurants. Because they can't afford to stay home, these workers are forced to go to work sick, putting the health of their co-workers and public at risk.

- 79% of food industry workers don't have earned sick days, according to a Food Chain Workers Alliance study.
- During the H1N1 epidemic, 7 million people caught the virus from co-workers who came to the job while sick.
- The Centers for Disease Control found that more than half of all norovirus outbreaks can be traced back to sick food service workers.

How would it work?

An earned sick days' policy in New Jersey would allow all workers to earn paid sick days that they can use when they or a family member are sick or need medical care, or in the case of domestic violence victims, to participate in criminal and civil proceedings, relocate their home, or obtain medical care.

Who would be covered?

All workers employed in New Jersey would be covered. By the same token, all employers in New Jersey would be required to provide earned sick days to employees, including small businesses. However, small businesses could be required to provide fewer earned sick days (see more below).

What would be allowable uses of earned sick days?

- For an employee's own mental or physical illness or for diagnostic or preventive medical care.
- For an employee's need to care for a close family member when the family member is ill or in need of diagnosis or medical care.
- To deal with medical, legal or relocation issues related to domestic violence or sexual assault.
- In the event a public official closes a school or place of business due to a public health emergency.

How would the sick time be earned? Is there a maximum?

- Workers would earn paid sick days based on hours worked. This guarantees that workers who work less than full-time will still be able to earn sick days.
- Workers would accrue 1 hour for every 30 worked, up to a maximum of 72 hours in a calendar year for employees of businesses with 10 or more employees; and up to a maximum of 40 hours for employees of businesses with fewer than 10 employees.
- Businesses that have paid time off and vacation time policies that are provided in the same amounts and that can be used for the same purposes and under the same conditions as under the proposed earned sick days law won't have to change their policies.
- Workers start to earn sick days as soon as they begin employment, with a 90-day waiting period before they are able to use the earned days.
- Workers can carry-over earned sick days from year to year, but employers will not be required to provide more than the required number of hours/days in any given year.

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