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ON HEELS OF HEALTH CARE REFORM, CITY COUNCIL REINTRODUCES PAID SICK DAYS BILL

Measure Would Ensure all New Yorkers Can Access Care without Loss of Income or Job

NEW YORK – Two days after President Obama signed healthcare reform into law, over a hundred people joined City Councilmembers to mark the reintroduction of the Paid Sick Time Act, a new version of legislation introduced in the Council last year, which would allow workers citywide to earn a modest amount of paid sick time on the job– up to 5 days a year for workers employed at small businesses and up to 9 days a year for large firms. Any employer that already provides any paid leave including personal days or vacation usable under equivalent conditions will not have to provide any additional paid sick leave.

According to a study released by the Community Service Society and A Better Balance, as many as 1.85 million working New Yorkers – 48% of working New Yorkers– lack even a single day of paid sick time.

"Delivering historic health reform is a victory for all New Yorkers. But until New Yorkers can take a day off when they are sick or need to care for their children— without having to miss a paycheck or worry about losing their job— we are not done. The time has come for paid sick days in New York City," said **Councilmember Gale A. Brewer**, lead sponsor of the Paid Sick Time act.

"Because of President Obama and Congress more New Yorkers will have access to healthcare. Now the next step needs to making sure that all New Yorkers who are sick can earn the paid time off they need to care for themselves, a sick child or go to the doctor," said **Donna Dolan**, **chairwoman of the [New York State Paid Family Leave Coalition](#)**.

The bill has been endorsed by a broad coalition including public health experts, small business owners, advocates for women and families, community organizations, labor unions, and the Working Families Party and is sponsored by 34 members of the New York City Council and Bill de Blasio, the New York City Public Advocate.

"The passage of healthcare reform is a historic victory that will make life better for all New Yorkers, but when nearly half of working New Yorkers can be fired or lose a day's pay for staying home with the flu we have more to do to make quality care a reality for all New Yorkers," said **Dan Cantor**, **Executive Director of the Working Families Party**.

The new version of the bill includes significant changes that came about as the result of a dialogue between the Council sponsors and stakeholders including small businesses, workers, public health experts, and chambers of commerce. Most significantly the new bill defines small businesses as those that employ fewer than 20 employees. The version of the legislation introduced last year more narrowly defined small businesses as those with fewer than 10 employees. With this change, the vast majority of New York City's private employers would be defined as small businesses under the law. According to the U.S. Census County Business Patterns data for 2007, the last year for which figures are available, 88% of New York City business establishments have fewer than 20 employees. As a result the vast majority of employers would only be required to provide up to 40 hours of paid sick time per year.

"We've taken into account the concerns of small businesses facing tough economic times, so that we can all come together around this as the right bill at the right time. Healthy workers mean more productive businesses and less turnover at businesses of all sizes," said **Councilmember Brewer**.

"Last weekend, the Federal government sent a message that access to quality, affordable health care is a right for every American - no matter what income bracket. Now it's up to us to close this public health loophole and make sure that no New Yorker needs to choose between a paycheck and a doctor's visit. No one wants to buy a lunch prepared by someone who should be home in bed, or send their child to school on a bus with a sick driver. Paid sick leave is smart policy for everyone involved. In this case, the prescription we need is just a good dose of common sense" said **Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer**.

At the rally New Yorkers spoke about their need for paid sick days.

"I have never had a single paid sick day at any job— from working in a factory to making deliveries for restaurants. Two months ago, after I was assaulted on the job, I spent a night in the hospital and a week recovering at home, on my boss's advice. But when I got back to work, my boss told me I had been replaced," said **Gabino Hernández of Brooklyn, a Make the Road New York member** who immigrated from Mexico thirteen years ago. "Without paid sick days to protect me, I lost the job that put food on the table for my four kids."

"Health reform should make life better, but if going to the doctor or taking my kids to the hospital still means no paycheck, I'll be back at square one," said **Shailesh Shrestha, a Board Member of ROC-NY**.

San Francisco and Washington, DC enacted paid sick days legislation in November, 2006 and March, 2008 respectively; in November, 2008, Milwaukee passed a paid sick days ordinance with 70% of voters in favor. Legislators in more than 15 cities and states are currently considering similar legislation.

The San Francisco Office of Labor Standards Enforcement has reported a smooth implementation of paid sick days. Employees did not use all of the available days of paid sick leave that were available and a study in the first year found that no businesses had closed or laid off workers citing paid sick leave. The Chamber of Commerce and the Golden Gate Restaurant Association have both reported that paid sick leave represents good public policy and has not presented undue hardships that could not be managed by their members.

"In San Francisco this legislation is making a tremendous difference in the lives of families who need to take a day off to care for a sick child or make it to the doctor without losing income or their job. It's time for New York City to follow their lead and ensure that health care reform makes a difference for the million and a half New Yorkers who do not currently have a single paid sick day," added **Sherry Leiwant, executive director of A Better Balance**.

"Powerful new evidence from San Francisco clearly shows that establishing paid sick leave as a workplace right and standard does not harm employment. In fact, it's a cost-effective policy that greatly benefits workers and employers. The City Council bill being reintroduced today would replicate the proven success of San Francisco's paid sick leave law," said **John Petro, an urban policy analyst at the nonpartisan, nonprofit Drum Major Institute for Public Policy**.

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