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**Testimony Submitted to the Senate Committee on Labor and Industrial Relations  
in Support of SB 289  
April 6, 2022**

**Submitted by: Feroza Freeland,  
Policy Manager of the Southern Office at A Better Balance**

**We urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 289.** This bill provides paid sick leave for working families in Louisiana who need time off when they or a loved one are ill, or for other health and caregiving needs, like caring for a child whose school has closed due to a public health emergency. We applaud Senator Barrow for championing this important legislation.

A Better Balance is a nonprofit organization working to ensure that all individuals can care for themselves and their loved ones without sacrificing their economic security. We have helped lead the fight for paid sick leave in states across the country. Our regional Southern Office serves families across the South, including in Louisiana, and we have heard from countless workers who lack adequate paid sick leave and are faced with an impossible choice between their family’s health and their economic security.

**Far Too Many Workers Lack Access to Paid Sick Leave**

Nationwide, nearly 33 million private sector workers do not have access to paid sick leave, with low-wage workers, Latino/a workers, and African-American workers disproportionately less likely to have paid sick time.<sup>1</sup> In the South, nearly 30% of workers do not have access to a single paid sick day.<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgent need for all workers to have the ability to take time to care for themselves and their loved ones without sacrificing their income or savings. However, without guaranteed paid leave, many workers simply cannot afford to stay home when they or a loved one are sick.

**Paid Sick Leave Benefits Businesses & the Economy**

Research shows that paid sick leave provides benefits to businesses, like increased productivity, without significantly increasing costs.<sup>3</sup> Paid sick leave helps reduce worker turnover—a major issue in today’s highly competitive labor market—which reduces costs incurred from hiring and training new employees.<sup>4</sup> Further, paid sick leave reduces the risk of “presenteeism”—the widespread phenomenon of workers coming to work with illnesses that reduce their productivity—a problem that leads to costly disruptions for employers and costs the national economy an estimated \$160 billion annually (\$234 billion after adjusting for inflation).<sup>5</sup>



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These business benefits have been borne out in the states and localities that have already enacted paid sick leave. One business owner stated that before their city’s paid sick leave law passed, “there were concerns that I and other small businesses had. But as it turns out, it hasn’t had the kind of impact that I worried about. Not even close. And in fact, the impact that I saw in my business was a much stronger bond between ourselves and our employees, higher productivity, and a *more* successful business, not a *less* successful business.”<sup>6</sup>

Survey data shows that most employers in one city with a paid sick leave law were able to cover absences with cost-free measures, such as temporarily reassigning duties to other employees.<sup>7</sup> Given the general ease of implementation and the advantages of sick time in the workplace, employers in that city have an overwhelmingly positive view of the paid sick leave law; 86% of employers surveyed described themselves as supportive of the law, with more than half saying they were “very supportive.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Paid Sick Leave Protects Public Health**

Paid sick leave has broad public health benefits and helps reduce the spread of contagious illness.<sup>9</sup> For example, in 2020, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) with bipartisan support. Among other provisions, this law provided many workers with temporary paid leave for health and caregiving needs related to COVID-19. Research showed that in states like Louisiana with no existing paid sick leave guarantee, this emergency paid leave policy under the federal FFCRA—which expired at the end of 2020—prevented an estimated 400 COVID-19 cases *per day*.<sup>10</sup>

People without access to paid sick leave are more likely to go to work while they have a contagious illness and are nearly twice as likely to send a sick child to school or daycare than those with access to this critical protection.<sup>11</sup> A lack of access to paid sick days is particularly harmful for service industry workers. Nearly two-thirds of restaurant workers have cooked or served food while sick<sup>12</sup>, and in 2011, nearly one in five food service workers went to work while vomiting or with diarrhea, creating dangerous health conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Further, workers with paid sick leave are more likely to seek preventive care than those without it, leading to better health outcomes, reduced healthcare burdens, and savings for taxpayer-funded health programs. Workers with access to paid sick days report better general health than workers without it and are less likely to delay preventive medical care for themselves or their loved ones.<sup>14</sup> For these reasons, workers with paid sick days are also less likely to use hospital emergency rooms, reducing national emergency department visits and medical costs by \$1.1 billion annually.<sup>15</sup>



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### **SB 289 Accurately Reflects Today's Families**

In addition to providing critical public health and economic protections, SB 289 accurately reflects today's families. The bill gives covered workers the right to take paid leave to care for their children, parents, spouse, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, and other close loved ones regardless of any legal or biological relationship. This definition of family has a track record of success. Eleven states and cities have already adopted paid sick time laws that include extended family and other loved ones, and approximately 16 million workers are covered by these laws.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the federal government, our nation's largest employer, has used an inclusive family definition in the context of funeral leave since 1969, voluntary leave transfers since 1989, and sick and annual leave since 1994.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the longstanding and growing usage of the family definition in this legislation, Louisiana's demographics show a clear need for recognizing a range of family members. Nearly 36% of households in the state consist either of an individual who lives alone—as nearly 525,000 Louisianians do—or someone who lives with nonrelatives, such as roommates or a significant other.<sup>18</sup> In an emergency or during an illness, these individuals may rely on care from loved ones such as extended relatives, significant others, a best friend who is like a sibling, or a loving neighbor. SB 289 would ensure that all workers can take time to care for the most important people in their lives.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic made clear that providing paid sick leave for all workers is a public health and economic necessity. We urge you to protect the health and economic security of Louisiana residents while boosting the state's economy by voting yes on SB 289.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2020, Bureau of Labor Statistics (Sept. 2020), <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2020/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2020.pdf>; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, A Look at Pay at the Top, the Bottom, and the Middle (May 2015), <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2015/a-look-atpay-at-the-top-the-bottom-and-in-between/pdf/a-look-at-pay-at-the-top-the-bottom-and-in-between.pdf>;

"Latinos and Their Families Need Paid Sick Days," National Partnership for Women & Families (March 2020), <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/latino-workers-need-paid-sick-days.pdf>; "African Americans and Their Families Need Paid Sick Days," National Partnership for Women & Families (January 2017), <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/african-american-workers-need-paid-sick-days.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2020, Bureau of Labor Statistics (Sept. 2020), <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2020/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2020.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Zoe Ziliak Michel, *The Business Benefits of Paid Sick Time*, CLASP (Mar. 2017), <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Business-Case-for-HFA-3.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> A Better Balance, *Sick Without A Safety Net*, March 2022, <https://www.abetterbalance.org/sick-without-a-safety-net/>.



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<sup>5</sup> *Paid Sick Days Are Good for Business*, National Partnership for Women & Families (October 2020), <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-good-for-business-and-workers.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Zoe Ziliak Michel, *During Healthy Families Act Days of Action, Business Owners Stress Benefits of Paid Sick Time*, CLASP, <https://www.clasp.org/blog/during-healthy-families-act-days-action-business-owners-stress-benefits-paid-sick-time>.

<sup>7</sup> Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, "No Big Deal: The Impact of New York City's Paid Sick Days Law on Employers," Center for Economic and Policy Research and the Murphy Institute of the City University of New York (September 2016), p. 19, <http://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/nyc-paid-sick-days-2016-09.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Vicky Lovell, *Paid Sick Days Improve Public Health by Reducing the Spread of Disease*, Institute for Women's Policy Research (Feb. 2006), <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/B250.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Pichler et al., *COVID-19 Emergency Sick Leave Has Helped Flatten The Curve in The United States*, Health Affairs (October 2020), [https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00863\\_](https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00863_)

<sup>11</sup> Tom W. Smith & Jibum Kim, *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences*, Nat'l Opinion Res. Ctr. at U. of Chi. (June 2010), <https://www.issuelab.org/resource/paid-sick-days-attitudes-and-experiences.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Rest. Opportunities Ctrs. United, *Serving While Sick: High Risks & Low Benefits for the Nation's Restaurant Workforce, and Their Impact on the Consumer* (Sept. 30, 2010), [https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/health\\_department/page/2139/servingwhilesick.pdf](https://www.co.benton.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/health_department/page/2139/servingwhilesick.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Steven Sumner et al., *Factors Associated with Food Workers Working While Experiencing Vomiting or Diarrhea*, 74 J. Food Protection 215 (2011), [http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ehsnet/Docs/JFP\\_ill\\_food\\_workers.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/ehsnet/Docs/JFP_ill_food_workers.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Miller et al., *Paid Sick Days and Health: Cost Savings from Reduced Emergency Department Visits*, Inst. for Women's Policy Res. (Nov. 2011),

<http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/paid-sick-days-and-health-cost-savings-from-reduced-emergency-department-visits>.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Paid Sick Time Laws*, A Better Balance (Dec. 22, 2021), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/paid-sick-time-laws/?export>.

<sup>17</sup> The relevant language covers "any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship." Absence and Leave: Funeral Leave, 34 Fed. Reg. 13,655 (Aug. 26, 1969) (codified at 5 C.F.R. pt. 630) (first implemented during the Vietnam War, allowing federal workers to take funeral leave for the combat-related deaths of loved ones); Absence and Leave; Voluntary Leave Transfer Program, 54 Fed. Reg. 4749 (January 31, 1989) (codified at 5 C.F.R. pt. 630); Absence and Leave; Sick Leave, 59 Fed. Reg. 62,266 (December 2, 1994) (codified at 5 C.F.R. pt. 630).

<sup>18</sup> See *Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: Louisiana*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP02, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?d=ACS%205-Year%20Estimates%20Data%20Profiles&table=DP02&tid=ACSDP5Y2018.DP02&y=2018&g=0400000US22>.