



Paid Sick Days and Family Leave Benefit Workers, Businesses, and the Economy

Background

Everyone gets sick, but more than a million workers in North Carolina have no opportunity to earn paid sick leave, and even fewer can take longer-term paid leave to address a serious health condition or welcome a new child. When illness inevitably strikes, they must take unpaid time off—sacrificing their wages so they can get well, take care of sick loved ones or recover from pregnancy. They may even face retaliation from their employers and could lose their jobs.

Paid leave policies, such as earned paid sick days and family and medical leave insurance, benefit workers, businesses, and the economy as a whole. Providing workers with paid sick days keeps sick workers at home, preventing contagion from spreading to other workers and customers, and giving them the time they need to fully recover and return to normal levels of productivity. In turn, this boosts businesses bottom lines by reducing turnover and the costs associated with training new employees.

Ensuring workers have paid time off to welcome a newborn, recover from childbirth, or deliver extended medical care to a loved one provides yields similar economic benefits, along with keeping new parents attached to the workforce and earning higher wages in the years after having children than those that do not. Additionally, providing paid family leave to all workers, no matter the size of the business, helps level the playing field for small businesses that often have trouble matching the more generous leave policies of larger employers.

Current Status

- Only 12 percent of American workers have access to paid family leave through their employers. Less than 40 percent have personal medical leave through an employer-provided temporary disability program, leaving out millions of workers who cannot afford to take time off for family and medical reasons.
- Forty percent of American workers are protected by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act—the only federal law designed to help working people meet the dual demands of job and family.
- 1.2 million private-sector workers in North Carolina are not entitled to any earned paid sick leave. That means 33 percent of the private-sector workforce must give up needed wages and possibly risk their jobs so they can care for their own health needs or the health needs of family members.
- Workers earning low incomes (who are disproportionately women and workers of color) are significantly less likely to have earned paid sick days. Sixty percent of those earning less than \$20,000 per year lack access to paid leave.
- Parents with paid sick days are better able to take care of their sick kids. On average, school-age children miss at least three school days per year due to health reasons, and

younger children have even higher rates of illness. When parents are available to care for their sick children, the children recover more quickly, are less likely to develop serious illnesses, and have improved overall health.

Questions for Candidates

- Do you support allowing workers to earn one hour of sick leave for every 30 hours worked, up to five days total paid time off?
- One option for providing paid family leave to workers is through a state-administered insurance program, in which all workers pay a small premium (roughly \$1.50 a week) and receive a weekly payout that replaces some portion of their wages when they take time off for legally protected family and medical reasons, like recovering from childbirth.



