

**Testimony Relevant to
HB. 1398 and SB. 930 An Act Establishing Paid Sick Days
June 14, 2011**

Chairman Wolf, Chairman Coakley-Rivera, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Mark Schuster and I am Chief of General Pediatrics at Children's Hospital Boston and William Berenberg Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School.

My colleagues and I have been studying the effects of paid sick leave on families, and I appreciate the chance to share my perspective on the topic.

As clinicians, we regularly recommend that sick children stay home from school to recover and to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. Unfortunately, many parents feel that they cannot stay home when their children are ill because they will miss out on pay or lose their job.

There are serious health consequences when parents delay taking a sick child to the doctor or knowingly send a sick child to school, including illnesses getting worse, others catching them, health care costs piling up, and ultimately more work being missed. One 6-year-old with asthma comes to mind. His mother knows how to judge his symptoms and when to bring him to our clinic. If his medicine isn't helping him breathe on a weekend or at night, they come right in. Because she acts quickly, we treat him in the clinic and avoid an admission. But when this happens on weekday mornings, she sends him to school for fear she'll lose her job if she misses work. Three times in the past 18 months, when she delayed bringing him in until after work, he had become so sick he needed to be hospitalized. Each time, what should have been three hours in our clinic turned into three days in the hospital.

A young girl taken care of by a colleague three weeks ago had a fever and flu-like symptoms. Her dad didn't feel he could miss work so he gave her Tylenol and sent her to school. Two days later, she had a rash on her cheeks indicating a very contagious illness called Fifth Disease. She had exposed her entire class, including her pregnant teacher, for whom the disease could seriously harm the fetus.

There is evidence from a national study that paid sick days could make a difference for parents like these. Employees with paid sick days were less likely than those without paid sick days to send a sick child to school.

But it's not just a matter of parents sending children to daycare or school when they shouldn't. Because children cannot care for themselves, parents are expected to provide a wide range of health care services without which our health care system would simply not function. In clinics and hospitals, we depend on parents to supervise their children, provide transportation, monitor their symptoms, help collect lab samples, administer therapies, and provide comfort

during procedures. Once children are home, today's parents assume a level of responsibility for monitoring and providing therapies that goes way beyond what was expected of them when I was in medical school. Children all too often stay an extra day or two in our hospital simply because their parent can't miss work to get trained on how to provide care at home.

My research on parents with chronically ill children showed that there was substantial unmet need for leave to care for them. Those who took leave, paid or not, felt it had good effects on their child's physical and emotional health, but staying home strained their finances and threatened their job security. Even among parents who took leave, 40 percent said they had to return to work sooner than was best for their child.

In a state that prides itself on providing the best for its children, that strives to deliver excellent education, that leads the nation in providing health insurance for all children, we can do better. We should want to do better. Our children deserve better. Parents belong with their children when they are sick. We shouldn't make them choose between their child and their job.

Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

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