

Tim Sullivan, MA AFL-CIO Testimony ~ July 14, 2011, 10:00 AM, Room A-1  
**Hearing before Joint Standing Committee on:  
LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**Bill(s):** An Act Establishing Paid Sick Days (H.B. 1398/S.B. 930)

**Sponsors:** Senator Patricia D. Jehlen, Representative Kay Khan

**Remarks:**

Chairwoman Coakley-Rivera, Chairman Wolf and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate 930 and House 1398, An Act to Establish Paid Sick Days. My name is Tim Sullivan; I am the Legislative and Communications Director of the Mass. AFL-CIO. I speak to you today not only on behalf of the over 400,000 members but also on behalf of all workers, both unionized and not. The Massachusetts AFL-CIO is proud to be a member of the Massachusetts Paid Leave Coalition. This is an excellent example of partnerships which the Massachusetts AFL-CIO has formed with community and faith groups to achieve common goals of economic and social justice for all working families.

Let's face it – everyone gets sick – yet almost 1 million workers in this commonwealth do not get a single paid sick day. Surely the provision of workers being able to *earn* a modest number of paid sick days so that they can care for themselves, or their sick children, spouses or elderly parents is a matter of fundamental fairness, dignity and equity, not to mention public health. One hundred and thirty-nine other countries have no problem providing this simple benefit to its workers. It is time we do so as well.

Around the nation, cities are passing similar paid sick days laws, and Connecticut just beat us to become the first state to do so. Our country's longest standing law is in San Francisco, where the results have been overwhelmingly positive. In 2006 city lawmakers in San Francisco passed a Paid Sick Leave Ordinance. Like we will hear over and over again today, business lobbyists there in San Francisco argued that paid sick leave would kill jobs and cut profits. However, now, 5 years later, according to a report released by the independent Institute for Women's Policy Research, six out of seven employers reported that the paid sick days policy has had no negative effect on profitability. In fact, two thirds of all employers now SUPPORT the program. The study also found that workers used their sick days responsibly, taking only what they needed, usually well below the limit. If San Francisco and Connecticut can do it, so can Massachusetts!

This is a small step with such a profound positive effect that will resonate throughout the fabric of every community in the commonwealth.

- It is a family, children's and seniors' issue: Caring for children when they are ill is a solemn responsibility of parents. The responsibility is intergenerational and extends to our parents when they need us.
- It is a women's issue: Women are predominately the primary caregivers and suffer the most stress by trying to balance the needs of their families and the demands of their jobs. On top of that, women are more likely to work in jobs that do not provide a single day of paid sick leave.
- It is a jobs issue: Workers with good benefits such as paid sick days demonstrate higher loyalty to employers, are healthier and lead less stressful lives.
- It is an employer issue: Avoiding "presenteeism" (coming to work sick) is good for the bottom line – employers benefit from paid sick day policies with less turnover, higher employee morale and increased productivity.
- It is a quality of life issue: Surely the United States can follow the lead of the rest of the industrialized world and provide time for health and for family care-giving.
- It is an economic justice issue: Although almost half of all workers have no paid sick days, this number is much higher for low-wage workers.
- It is a public health issue: Public health officials recommend that adults with the flu stay home for 4 days, or 24 hours after symptoms are gone, whichever is longer, not only to restore their own health, but to reduce the spread of disease. This advice has never, in recent history, been as critical as it is with respect to the outbreak of swine flu. The experts' advice, however, is impossible for some workers to follow because they cannot afford to lose a day's pay or risk being fired for taking sick time.
- It is a personal health issue: When workers are forced to come to work sick, they make their coworkers sick and their own health suffers. Children who have parental care recuperate more quickly and with routine checkups stay healthier, and the elderly can postpone or eliminate the need for nursing home admission when they are cared for. This care also provides substantial savings for our health care system, which is a huge focus in these times of skyrocketing health insurance costs.
- It is a health care cost containment issue: Health care expenditures decrease when workers have paid sick days to seek routine and preventive physician care – an emergency room visit is about 3 times the cost of a physician office visit. Without paid sick days, workers and their families are less likely to have a regular doctor, to seek preventive care and early treatment, and to adequately manage chronic illnesses leading to more costly care later. In other words, what good is health insurance if you cannot take the time to use it? This point is especially true in Massachusetts, where we mandate that all residents carry health insurance. People should be able to utilize the health care we force them to pay for, and adopting paid sick days is the only way to guarantee this.
- And finally, it is a values issue: No Massachusetts worker should have to choose between caring for a family and earning a day's pay. Clearly, our state needs a new basic workplace standard to accommodate the needs of today's working families. If we believe in family values, then we should demonstrate that by valuing families and providing paid sick days. President Obama put it best: "...nobody in America should have to choose between keeping their jobs and caring for a sick child or ailing parent." And so did the late Senator Kennedy, when he said time and time again, "No one should have to choose between the child they love and the job that they need."

On behalf of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and the working men and women of Massachusetts, I strongly urge this committee to give this bill a favorable report as soon as possible. Thank you.