

**Testimony of Elizabeth Watson  
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**Before the  
Maryland House Economic Matters Committee  
February 13, 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the National Women's Law Center in support of House Bill 385, the Healthy Working Families Act of 2015. The National Women's Law Center has been working since 1972 to secure and defend women's legal rights, including women's rights to equal opportunity in the workplace. We believe that requiring employers to provide workers with the right to earn paid sick days is crucial to removing barriers to women's economic opportunity. The National Women's Law Center urges you to pass the Healthy Working Families Act which would allow workers to earn one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked, up to a maximum of 7 full days per year.

**I. Too Many Workers are Forced to Choose Between Their Health and Their Jobs**

Taking time off to go to the doctor, recover from an illness or care for a sick family member should not cost a worker her job. But all too often, workers are forced to choose between their health—or the health of their loved ones—and their jobs. At least 48 million private sector workers in the United States cannot earn paid sick days for their own illness and millions more cannot earn paid time off to care for a sick child or family member.<sup>1</sup> In Maryland, more than 720,000 workers do not have a paid sick day and risk job loss when they keep a sick child home from school or take time off because they are sick.<sup>2</sup> And low-wage workers, who can least afford to lose a day's pay, are also least likely to have access to paid time off when they are sick. Indeed, over half of full-time Maryland workers who earn less than \$35,000 a year lack access to paid sick days.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 70 percent of Maryland's low-wage workers—those making \$10.10 or less an hour—are women.<sup>4</sup> When low-wage workers take time off without pay they can quickly slip into poverty: a two-child family with a

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<sup>1</sup> NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES (NPWF), FACT SHEET: NOT ENOUGH FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES: HIGH STAKES FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES 2 (Jan. 2015), *available at* <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/not-enough-family-friendly-policies.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> WORKING MATTERS, MARYLAND CAMPAIGN FOR PAID SICK DAYS, SUPPORT THE HEALTHY WORKING FAMILIES ACT: EVERYONE GETS SICK AND EVERYONE DESERVES TIME TO RECOVER WITHOUT RISKING THEIR ECONOMIC STABILITY 1 (Jan. 2015), *available at* [http://www.publicjustice.org/uploads/file/pdf/Fact\\_Sheet\\_Healthy\\_Working\\_Families\\_Act\\_2015.pdf](http://www.publicjustice.org/uploads/file/pdf/Fact_Sheet_Healthy_Working_Families_Act_2015.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> NWLC, *Women in the Low-Wage Workforce by State: Women are Overrepresented in the Low-Wage Workforce in Every State* 1 (2014), *available at* [http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pv\\_fs\\_low\\_wage\\_state\\_tables.pdf](http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pv_fs_low_wage_state_tables.pdf).

single parent working full-time and making \$10 an hour falls below the poverty line after missing just three days of work.<sup>5</sup>

Given the extreme consequences that can follow from missing work, workers who lack access to paid sick days are more likely to go to work sick or send their kids to school sick, putting the public's health at risk.<sup>6</sup> They are more likely to miss out on preventive care which is available during regular daytime hours, and to be forced to resort to seeking hospital emergency room care instead.<sup>7</sup>

## II. The Right to Earn Paid Sick Days Is Crucial to Women's and Families' Economic Security

Women make up nearly half of Maryland's workforce.<sup>8</sup> But despite women's growing role as breadwinners for their families, women still shoulder the lion's share of the caregiving responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> In the more than 26 percent of households in Maryland that are headed by single mothers, there is no other parent with whom to share caregiving responsibilities.<sup>10</sup> In both single and two-parent households, when children get sick, it's their mothers who usually care for them while they get better. Yet fifty-four percent of working women in Maryland lack access to paid sick days and 20 percent report that they or a family member have been fired or disciplined for taking time off to cope with an illness or to care for a family member.<sup>11</sup> The combination of low pay, lack of control over their work schedules, and lack of access to earned paid time off make it extremely difficult for all workers, and especially women, to juggle work and family responsibilities. Earned paid sick days would help millions of women and men take time to care for themselves and their families.

## III. The Healthy Working Families Act Is Good for Workers and Good for Business

Providing workers with the right to earn paid sick days is not just good for Americans and their families, it is good for business and society. Workers with paid sick days are more productive and less likely to leave their jobs. Businesses that provide sick days save money by reducing workforce turnover and increasing worker productivity.<sup>12</sup> In Maryland, providing earned six days is expected to yield \$195 million annually for employers, mainly due to reduced turnover.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>6</sup> See NPWF, EVERYONE GETS SICK. NOT EVERYONE HAS TIME TO GET BETTER. 2, 4-6 (July 2011), available at [http://go.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/PSD\\_Briefing\\_Book.pdf](http://go.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/PSD_Briefing_Book.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> WORKING MATTERS, *supra* note 2, at 1.

<sup>9</sup> NWLC, COLLATERAL DAMAGE: SCHEDULING CHALLENGES FOR WORKERS IN LOW-WAGE JOBS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES 1 (Apr. 2014), available at [http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/collateral\\_damage\\_scheduling\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/collateral_damage_scheduling_fact_sheet.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> NWLC, *Women and Poverty, State by State* (Sept. 2014), available at <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/women-and-poverty-state-state>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> NPWF, *supra* note 5 at 5.

<sup>13</sup> WORKING MATTERS, *supra* note 2, at 1.

Without earned paid sick days, health care costs rise. For example, adults without access to paid sick days are twice as likely to go to the emergency room because of their inability to schedule needed appointments during regular work hours.<sup>14</sup> Parents who cannot take paid time off are five times as likely to report taking a child or another family member to the ER because they could not take time off during work hours.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, sick workers put everyone's health at risk. And workers in restaurants and similar service industries requiring frequent contact with the public are among the least likely to have paid sick days.

#### IV. Conclusion

For these reasons, the National Women's Law Center enthusiastically supports the Healthy Working Families Act. It is time for federal, state, and local lawmakers to stand up for hard-working families and put in place workplace policies, including paid sick days, that all workers—and especially working women and their families—need.

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<sup>14</sup> NPWF, *supra* note 5, at 5.

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