

REMARKS OF THE HON. ROSA L. DELAURO
HEALTHY FAMILIES ACT – SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE AND LABOR
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Good morning. Chairman Woolsey, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections today. I appreciate your tireless leadership on this issue along with Chairman Miller who is a cosponsor and a vocal advocate of this bill. And I want to thank you for holding this first legislative hearing on the Healthy Families Act: The absence of a national paid sick days policy today affects countless families and workers and this hearing is an important sign of progress on their behalf.

There is no simple answer when it comes to strengthening our working and middle class families. But there are a number of critical steps we can take -- initiatives which have proven successful at making opportunity real for families and children.

And that is why legislation like the Healthy Families Act is so important. I am here today for a simple reason: because I believe workers in America ought to have paid sick days. It is a basic matter of right and wrong.

And yet almost half of all private sector workers do not have a single paid day off that they can use to care for themselves or a sick family member. These workers put their jobs on the line every time they take a day off.

The Healthy Families Act, which I introduced with Senator Kennedy, would correct this injustice, requiring employers with 15 or more workers to provide 7 days of paid sick leave annually for their own medical needs or to care for a family member. Under the new rules workers would earn one hour of paid sick time for each 30 hours worked, up to a total of 56 hours in a calendar year.

This is really about simply setting the floor on what we all can agree is good corporate citizenship. This is about staying competitive as a nation. But that is harder and harder to do, when 57 million people in our workforce do not have the right to take time off work when they are sick, or when they need to stay home to care for a sick child or elderly relative. Meanwhile, nations all around the world, our competitors -- do not face the same handicap and are surging ahead.

It is about keeping our businesses and workers strong -- and helping to maintain their edge in tightening global economy. But, we also know, it is hard to stay ahead when 19 of the 20 most competitive countries in the world guarantee paid sick days -- and the United States is the odd one out.

What does it say when Lesotho and Papua New Guinea are implementing paid sick days to give their businesses and their entire nation a competitive edge, yet America still does not get it?

Ultimately this issue as part of the larger health care debate going on right now. That is why we named it ‘Healthy Families Act.’” As we have learned from the recent H1N1 outbreak: providing paid sick days to workers is also an urgent matter of preventing the spread of disease.

We know that infectious diseases like H1N1 can spread rapidly throughout the country when proper precautions are not taken. We saw how countless public health officials, and even the President, took to the airwaves to ask folks to follow a simple guideline: If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

And yet, following this critical advice is virtually impossible for far too many Americans. As I mentioned, almost half of all private sector workers do not have a single paid day off that they

can use to care for themselves or a sick family member. These workers put their jobs on the line every time they take a day off.

With the economy still struggling to recover, study after study has pointed to cost benefits that paid sick days yield to employers, workers, and taxpayers. It is no surprise that we can reduce costs across the board by improving access to appropriate care for chronic illnesses and timely treatment for acute medical needs, while reducing the spread of contagious illness.

When working parents must go to work sick, they risk infecting their entire workplace, then we all pay the price for denying employees paid sick days -- especially if they work in health care, child care, or food service. Indeed, well below every other major industry, only 15 percent of workers in food service have paid sick days -- endangering hundreds even thousands of patrons.

What is more: working women and their families, in particular, would benefit from our bill. We all know that the brunt of the responsibility for caring for children still falls upon women - that is the way it is. Half of all working mothers report that they must miss work when a child is sick – and half of them do not get paid. When nearly a third of all working mothers fear their job evaluation might suffer from missing work, imagine what this legislation could mean to them: peace of mind.

Of course, while paid sick days will make a tremendous difference, it is no silver bullet. We must embrace a *comprehensive* pro-family agenda. Today, families' fortunes are increasingly tied to an ever more volatile economy. Yet with a weak safety net stretched thin, those who bear the brunt have a very difficult time bouncing back. We have a responsibility to confront the unique challenges that INCOME INSECURITY places on working and middle class families.

That means expanding the EITC, or supporting child care, pay equity and, Chairman Woolsey, initiatives like your own Family Income to Respond to Significant Transitions or FIRST Act to allow more workers to take advantage of the Family and Medical Leave Act. I commend you for this proposal and am happy to join you in supporting it.

Ultimately, I believe our decisions and actions must reflect a broader worldview that begins with equal opportunity and giving people who strive to better themselves the tools to succeed. Thank you again Chairman Woolsey for the opportunity to testify this morning. We must continue to honor the work and responsibility that is the basis of our shared community.