



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H 5413 - 2017:
RHODE ISLAND HEALTHY AND SAFE FAMILIES AND WORKPLACES ACT**

TO: Hon. Robert E. Craven, Chair, and members of the House Committee on Labor
FROM: Zoe Ziliak Michel, Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy

My name is Zoe Ziliak Michel, and I am a policy analyst at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). CLASP is a national organization that works to improve the lives of low income people by developing and advocating for federal, state, and local policies that strengthen families and create pathways to education and work. CLASP strongly supports H 5413, the Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act, which will help Rhode Islanders currently living in poverty and bring financial benefits to Rhode Island businesses.

Approximately 170,000 people working in Rhode Island—more than 2 in 5 workers in the state—are currently unable to earn paid sick days.¹ Low-wage workers are particularly hard hit: nationwide, almost three-quarters of the lowest 10 percent of wage earners do not have access to sick days.² H 5413 would make it possible for many of these workers to take the time they need to recover from illness, care for sick loved ones, or deal with the effects of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

The health and safety implications of this policy are profound. Research shows that workers who do not have sick days are more likely to come to work when they are sick or to send sick children to school; as a result, more people become infected with contagious diseases like influenza or norovirus.³ This poses a serious public health threat. Further, when workers don't have time away from their jobs to recover, they are much more likely to get injured on the job.

Businesses also win when workers have earned sick days. Employees who are forced to work while sick are less productive and may make valuable customers ill.⁴ When people lose their jobs because they take time off to recover from illness, employers bear the expensive costs of turnover. Unsafe workplaces are also more costly to employers, who must contend with increased healthcare costs, workers' compensation costs, and lost productivity. Finally, workers are consumers, too. When they lose wages or their jobs because they are ill, they have less money to spend in their communities. Local businesses feel the effects of reduced demand, and the economy suffers.

Studies of outcomes of paid sick days laws in other jurisdictions confirm that these laws improve work environments without increasing costs. A year and a half after Connecticut's paid sick days law took effect, almost half of employers covered by the statute reported *no* increase in business costs due to the law, while another fifth reported an increase in costs of under 2 percent.⁵ Similarly, a year after Jersey City, New Jersey's ordinance took effect, 42 percent of employers who changed their policies to comply with the law "saw increases in productivity, improved quality of new hires, or a reduction in turnover," and 28 percent said fewer employees were coming to work sick.⁶

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Rhode Island has long been a leader in supporting working families. The state’s temporary caregiver insurance (TCI) program, which built upon its decades-old temporary disability insurance (TDI) infrastructure, evidences the legislature’s strong commitment to ensuring the state’s residents can take time to care. Building on the success of the state’s TDI and TCI programs, we encourage Rhode Island to join the seven states and dozens of cities and counties around the nation that have passed earned paid sick days laws. CLASP respectfully urges a favorable report on this legislation.

Sincerely,

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Policy Analyst
CLASP

¹ *Workers’ Access to Paid Sick Days in the States*, Institute for Women’s Policy Research and National Partnership for Women and Families, 2015, <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/Access%20to%20Paid%20Sick%20Days%20in%20the%20States%205-18-2015.pdf>.

² U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Selected Paid Leave Benefits: Access,” March 2016, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs2.t06.htm>.

³ Tom W. Smith and Jibum Kim, *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences*, Public Welfare Foundation, 2010, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/paid-sick-days-attitudes-and-experiences.pdf>.

⁴ Zoe Ziliak Michel, *The Business Benefits of Paid Sick Time: Healthy Employees Lead to Healthy Ledgers*, CLASP, 2016, <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Business-Case-for-HFA-3.pdf>.

⁵ Eileen Appelbaum, Ruth Milkman, et al., *Good for Business? Connecticut’s Paid Sick Leave Law*, Center for Economic Policy and Research, 2014, <http://cepr.net/publications/reports/good-for-business-connecticuts-paid-leave-law>.

⁶ Danielle Lindemann and Dana Britton, *Earned Sick Days in Jersey City: A Study of Employers and Employees at Year One*, Rutgers Center for Women and Work, 2015, http://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/smlr.rutgers.edu/files/documents/Jersey_City_ESD_Issue_Brief.pdf.