

Paid Sick Leave - 2008

You shall not abuse the needy or destitute laborer, whether a countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets, for he is needy and urgently depends on it; else he will cry to the Eternal against you and you will incur guilt. (Deut. 24: 14-15)

You must not remain indifferent. (Deut. 22:3)

Issue

Many workers in the United States and Canada today must go to work sick or leave sick children home alone because they do not have paid sick leave.

Background

Women of Reform Judaism has long supported the rights of workers to obtain decent wages and working conditions. WRJ also recognizes the importance of workers being able to take care of the needs of their family members. In 1987, the 36th biennial assembly passed a resolution supporting passage of the Family Medical Leave Act. Then in 1993, the 39th assembly passed another resolution calling on the government to adopt laws that would support the needs of families. Further, in 2004, the board of directors passed a resolution calling for improving the treatment of particularly low wage workers.

Today, roughly fifty-seven million workers in the United States lack paid sick days to care for themselves. Ninety-four million workers do not have paid leave to care for sick family members.

In Canada, with the exception of the 10% of the workforce who are employed in federal undertakings regulated by the federal parliament, provincial legislatures regulate employee relations. Seven of Canada's thirteen provinces and territories require the provision of unpaid leave by employers. None require paid sick leave.

Those without sick leave are primarily low-income workers, working a full work-week but on an hourly basis, and/or part-time employees. The responsibility of caring for family members falls particularly heavily on women who are often in the retail or service sector and minimally paid.

When workers do not have paid sick leave, they feel forced to come to work ill, endangering the health of those around them as well as risking making themselves sicker. Their choice, however, is to do that or risk losing their jobs or wages and become unable to pay for the necessities of life for themselves and their families. When their children become ill, they either send them to school sick, risking spreading the illness to other children, or leave them at home alone, which has its dangers. To stay home with their children would also risk their jobs or their ability to pay for the needs of their families.

While requiring companies to pay for sick leave for their employees might be costly, the dangers to society from failing to do so are greater. Public health is put at risk when sick people feel required to come to work or are sent to school. Medical costs also are raised when sick people ignore their illnesses and keep working only to become sicker. Moreover, productivity increases when paid sick days are provided because of reduced spread of illness and employee turnover.

For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit www.wrj.org/social-justice-home

Resolution

Jewish tradition teaches us that we must take care of our own health and care for the health of others. It also teaches us to treat workers with justice. Women of Reform Judaism therefore resolves to:

1. Support the passage of legislation at all levels of government requiring employers to provide workers with paid sick days that could be used either for employees' own illnesses or illnesses of their family and/or household members;
2. Call on our sisterhoods to join like-minded coalitions to campaign for paid sick days; and
3. Urge our sisterhoods to work with the leadership of their congregations to review and, if not in place, implement paid sick leave for congregational employees.