



**Testimony of Ellen Small Billard, MSW
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**Labor and Public Employees Committee
In support of S.B. 913 An Act Mandating Employers to Provide Paid Sick
Leave to Employees**

March 1, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski, and members of the committee. My name is Ellen Small Billard, and I am the coordinator of CABHN, the Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. **I am here to support SB 913 An Act Mandating Employers to Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees.**

CABHN is a network of organizations collectively devoted to helping individuals and families meet their basic needs. It is for that reason I am here to support this bill. I believe it addresses two very important basic needs: the need to care for yourself when sick and the need to care for the health of your family—two very important needs that you and I likely take for granted.

Because an estimated 553,000 Connecticut workers do not receive a single paid sick day all year, **this is an issue that cannot be ignored.**

Denying families access to paid sick leave is not only a public health risk, but it is also an unwise business practice. I would encourage you to **remember the following three reasons why Paid Sick Days is the right choice for Connecticut** when considering this bill.

- 1.) **Paid sick days promote better public health.** When workers go to work sick – preparing our food, driving our children to school, caring for older adults – they share their germs with everyone, leading to more rapid outbreak of devastating illnesses such as the H1N1 virus. *This defies common sense.*
- 2.) **Paid sick days promote greater family economic security.** 77% of low-wage workers lack paid sick days. These are the very workers we need to be most dedicated to helping keep stable jobs to support their families and move out of poverty into economic stability. In today's challenging economy, the Governor

and the Legislature are increasingly committed to creating and maintaining jobs for Connecticut workers. *Why, then, shouldn't we pass legislation that makes it easier for families to maintain gainful, stable employment?*

- 3.) **Paid sick days save employers money in the long run.** SB 913 requires workers to accrue paid sick hours over the course of one year and places limits on when employees can begin to utilize this time. It by no means encourages – or allows – workers to abuse this benefit. In places where paid sick days legislation has passed, no adverse effects to businesses have been demonstrated. On the contrary, in San Francisco, employment in the restaurant industry increased 3.9% after the law took effect. Other studies have shown the savings provided by paid sick days outweighs the costs by over \$3.50 per employee per hour.

Connecticut encourages individuals to stay home from work or school if they are sick.

Why do over 500,000 workers in Connecticut not have this option?

Instead of staying home to recover from the flu and protect their customers and co-workers from infection, Connecticut's food service employees must go to work sick or lose vital income and perhaps risk losing their job. Our school bus drivers must still show up to drive our children to school.

Instead of staying home to recover and receive the loving care of their parent, children whose parents lack paid sick leave must attend school despite their illness, delaying their own recovery and exposing their peers to illness. **Parents so often must choose between caring for a sick child and keeping their job.** Between holding their crying child when they are shivering with fever and paying the rent. *What would you do if you were faced with this choice?*

Unfortunately, **44% of Connecticut's workforce does not have a choice.**

Today I urge you to make a tremendous difference in the lives of thousands of Connecticut's hard-working parents by helping them better care for themselves and their families.

Providing employees with paid sick days is a benefit that everyone will reap. It increases workplace productivity and patron safety as employees are most productive when they are well and customers of service industry businesses are best protected when those preparing their food are healthy.

Please support **S.B. 913 An Act Mandating Employers to Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees.** Thank you for your time and attention to this bill.