EARNED SICK DAYS
A Basic Workplace Standard for New Jersey

When workers get sick they need time to get well. It's just common sense. But in New Jersey, some 1.2 million workers – that's more than 1 in 3 of us – do not earn paid sick days. Many of these workers are in low-wage service jobs. They care for our children and the elderly. They prepare and serve food in our restaurants. They can't afford to stay home, even if they're sick. An earned sick days' policy would boost our economy, our families and our community.

Currently, no federal or state law guarantees workers access to earned sick & safe days when they or their families are sick, or when they need to deal with medical, legal or relocation issues related to domestic violence or sexual assault. Earned sick days ordinances have been passed in Jersey City, Newark, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Portland, and Seattle, and legislation has been passed in Connecticut.

Earned sick days strengthen New Jersey's economy
When working families have enough money in their pockets to cover the basics, that helps the whole economy. Losing a day's wages -- or worse, a job -- undermines a family's ability to contribute to the economy and forces many to rely on public programs to stay afloat.

Many New Jersey business owners have already spoken out in favor of earned sick days because they know it's not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. Businesses that provide paid sick days to workers to recover from an illness or care for a sick family member benefit from workers' increased commitment and productivity – a win-win situation for all!
- Earned sick days result in reduced turnover, which saves businesses money. Replacing and retraining a worker can cost up to 200% of a worker's annual compensation.
- Employee "presenteeism" (when employees go to work sick) costs employers far more than worker absenteeism ($180 billion a year compared to $118 billion a year according to one study).
- Economies in places like San Francisco have improved after enacting earned sick day policies, including higher job growth than neighboring communities.

Earned sick days strengthen New Jersey's families
Every family wants what's best for their children. Without access to earned sick days, many parents are forced to choose between their child's health and their family's financial stability. Earned sick days make it easier to be a good employee and a good parent.
- Parents with earned sick days are 20% less likely to send sick children to school.
- Nearly one quarter of US adults have been fired or threatened with job loss for taking time off to recover from an illness or care for a dependent.

"Providing families with time to care means strong families, strong workplaces, and strong communities."

Earned sick days protect the public health

Many workers without earned sick days are in low-wage service jobs, caring for vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly or preparing and serving food in restaurants. Because they can't afford to stay home, these workers are forced to go to work sick, putting the health of their co-workers and public at risk.

- 79% of food industry workers don't have earned sick days.
- During the H1N1 epidemic, 7 million people caught the virus from co-workers who came to the job while sick.
- More than half of all stomach flu outbreaks can be traced back to sick food service workers.

How would it work?

All New Jersey workers could earn paid sick days to use when they or a family member are sick or need medical care, or in the case of domestic violence victims, to participate in criminal and civil proceedings, relocate their home, or obtain medical care.

Who would be covered?

All workers employed in New Jersey would be covered. By the same token, all employers in New Jersey, including small businesses, would be required to provide earned sick days to employees. However, small businesses would be required to provide fewer earned sick days (see more below).

How could earned sick days be used?

- For an employee's own mental or physical illness or for diagnostic or preventive medical care.
- For an employee's need to care for a close family member when the family member is ill or in need of diagnosis or medical care.
- To deal with medical, legal or relocation issues related to domestic violence or sexual assault.
- In the event a public official closes a school or place of business due to a public health emergency.

How would the sick time be earned? Would there be a maximum?

- Workers would earn paid sick days based on hours worked. This guarantees that workers who work less than full-time would still be able to earn sick days.
- Workers would accrue 1 hour for every 30 worked, up to a maximum of 72 hours in a calendar year for employees of businesses with 10 or more employees; and up to a maximum of 40 hours for employees of businesses with fewer than 10 employees.
- Businesses that have paid time off and vacation time policies that are provided in the same amounts and that can be used for the same purposes and under the same conditions as under the proposed earned sick days law wouldn't have to change their policies.
- Workers would start to earn sick days as soon as they begin employment, with a 90-day waiting period before being able to use the earned days.
- Workers would carry over earned sick days from year to year, but employers would be required to provide more than the required number of hours/days in any given year.

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