

**Testimony in Support of LD 1159
An Act To Support Healthy Workplaces and Healthy Families by Providing Paid Sick Leave to
Certain Employees**

**by
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Good morning Senator Volk, Representative Fecteau, members of the joint committee on labor, commerce, research, and economic development. I am James Myall, a policy analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I am here to testify in support of LD 1159, “An Act To Support Healthy Workplaces and Healthy Families by Providing Paid Sick Leave to Certain Employees.”

Access to paid sick time would be one of the most meaningful changes this committee could make to the lives of working Mainers. Every year, tens of thousands of workers lose wages to care for themselves, a sick child, or an elderly relative because their employer does not offer paid sick time. Still more workers lose their job because their employer would not recognize their responsibilities to their family or their own sickness.

Paid sick leave is not a radical concept. It’s already the law for businesses in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Vermont, as well as a number of cities.¹ When young families are looking where to work, the provision of an essential benefit like paid time off could make the difference between moving to Boston or Burlington, rather than Bangor. Since 2015, federal contractors, including those based in Maine, have had to provide paid sick leave to their employees. Countries around the world have mandatory provisions for paid sick time, without significant impacts on business growth. Since 2013, when New York City mandated paid sick time for businesses with more than five employees, the overwhelming majority of employers (85%) reported no increase in costs as a result.² A similar overwhelming majority (86%) was supportive of the new law. Studies consistently find that provision of paid time off results in lower turnover of workers and higher productivity.³

Workers in the lowest-paid occupations are least likely to be able to take time off to care for themselves or a family member without losing their wages or, sometimes, their job.⁴ These are the workers who need the time the most—people in or near poverty; mothers with children; those with chronic diseases, or generally poor health caused by a life in or near poverty.

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The current lack of paid sick leave has public health consequences. None of us wants a side of bacteria with our fries. But a 2015 survey found that half of fast-food workers in the U.S. frequently go to work despite being sick; **nearly all (88%)** fast-food workers admitting going to work sometimes, despite an illness. The primary reason given was lack of paid leave.⁵

We would like to see the requirement for paid sick leave applied as broadly as possible. Any provision for paid leave is certainly welcome, our calculations show that as it currently stands, this bill would give 87,000 Maine workers access to paid leave, and an additional 71,000 workers at small businesses with access to unpaid leave. However, the exemption for employers with fewer than 50 employees means that two-thirds of the Mainers without access to paid leave would be left out with this legislation.⁶ We would ask the committee to consider reducing this exemption. Current Maine Family and Medical Leave law exempts those with 15 employees or less; many of the other jurisdictions have a much lower exemption threshold, or none at all.⁷

Having said that, we support any measure that provides working Mainers with access to paid leave, and urge the committee to pass this legislation on behalf of the 180,000 Mainers without the ability to care for themselves or family members without fear of losing wages or employment.

Thank you, I'll be happy to take any questions

Fig. 1: Maine Employees Without Access to Paid Sick Leave

Size of company	Total employees	Employees without paid sick leave	Employees w/o paid sick leave
Any	483,532	36%	179,237
<50	253,658	47%	119,219
50-99	64,756	40%	25,902
100-499	103,942	28%	29,104
>500	25,058	20%	5,012

Sources: Employee numbers calculated from Maine Department of Labor; access to paid sick days from US Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey, 2015.

Notes:

¹ <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/paid-sick-leave.aspx>

² <http://cepr.net/publications/reports/no-big-deal-the-impact-of-new-york-city-s-paid-sick-days-law-on-employers>

³ <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/01437720310479723v>

⁴ http://paysickdays.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/No_Time_To_Be_Sick.pdf

⁵ <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/10/19/449213511/survey-half-of-food-workers-go-to-work-sick-because-they-have-to>

⁶ MECEP analysis of data from Maine DoL and US Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey.

⁷ <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/paid-sick-days-statutes.pdf>