



Written Testimony for Joint Hearing of Senate Labor, Commerce & Economic Development, and Executive Committees

Subject Matter: Wage Equity, Workers' Rights and Consumer Protection
Thursday, November 12, 2020 at 1:00 p.m.

Women Employed is dedicated to improving the economic access of women and removing barriers to economic equity, with a particular emphasis on low-paid working women and women of color. The issues being discussed in this hearing, especially wage equity and workers' rights, are those we fight for every day and we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony about policies we can pass and implement that will impact the working women of Illinois.

In 2016, we fought for and won paid sick days ordinances in Chicago and Cook County, giving up to five paid sick days to more than half a million working people, many of them workers of color. Thirty months after Chicago implemented paid sick days, the Chicagoland region had added more than 70,000 jobs, while job growth in other areas of Illinois remained stagnant. Paid sick days put money in workers' pockets—estimates suggest that each worker gains more than \$1,000 per year as a result of paid sick time. Expanding paid sick days statewide could boost worker incomes by \$1.5 billion annually. The economic benefits are obvious.

Yet in Illinois, 1.5 million workers—including 19 percent of Black workers and 9 percent of Latinx workers—lack access to a single paid sick day. During our current global health crisis, Illinois' essential, frontline workers are disproportionately people of color, facing the public and a higher risk of infection. Many are also without paid sick days, and therefore may not be able to care for themselves or family members when they are sick or keep themselves, their families, or their communities safe from the spread of COVID-19.

Furthermore, the effects of paid sick days during health crises like the one we face today are clear. During other epidemics, access to paid sick days contributed to as many as seven million fewer infections nationwide.

HB 2343 would extend paid sick days across Illinois, ensuring all workers can take the days they need to care for themselves or family members. In addition to being responsive to our current pandemic, this law would allow workers to care for themselves and their families and to avoid spreading other illnesses like the flu and the common cold to their coworkers, customers, and

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others they come into contact with. It also permits workers to use paid sick time for school closures, recovery from domestic violence or sexual assault, visits to family members in jail or prison, or civil or criminal court appointments. By passing HB 2343, Illinois would join 13 states and the District of Columbia in securing paid sick days for its workers.

In addition to passing HB 2343 and giving workers access to permanent paid sick days statewide, Illinois should consider emergency paid sick days in response to this pandemic and other disasters. The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act provides limited paid sick days to workers, but may leave more than 80 percent of Illinoisans without access to the emergency days. Unless Congress takes action, the federal paid sick time benefits expire at the end of this year—though we have no reason to believe that COVID-19 will be any less dangerous then. Giving workers—including gig workers and other misclassified employees—access to emergency paid sick time to address issues related to COVID-19 could help prevent the spread of the disease.

These numbers are important, but it's also important to recognize the human impact of a lack of access to paid sick days. Workers are forced to choose between their jobs and their lives and livelihoods. We know of one nursing home worker experiencing COVID-19 symptoms who was faced with two impossible options: take unpaid time off that could put her job and the employer-sponsored healthcare she needed in jeopardy or go to work sick and potentially infect her residents. Her employer was located outside of Cook County and too large to be subject to the federal paid sick leave laws. However, if she had access to state permanent paid sick days, she would have been able to take the time to get tested and get results. If she had access to emergency paid sick days, she would have been able to isolate throughout her symptoms and lower the risk of passing the disease to the residents of her nursing home.

These stories are sadly common in a state without paid sick days. We can choose to make them rare in Illinois and to ensure the safety of our workers and families, by **passing HB 2343 and emergency sick days to address pandemics and disasters.**

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