

# Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Eliza Townsend, executive director of the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am pleased to speak to you today in support of LD 369, *An Act to Support Healthy Workplaces and Healthy Families by Providing Earned Paid Sick Leave to Certain Employees*.

We all get sick, but not everyone can take the time to get well. An estimated 198,000 Mainers cannot afford to take even one day off with pay when they are sick.<sup>i</sup>

The ability to earn paid sick time and to apply that time in instances of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking is an issue of the highest priority. The low wage occupations where workers are least likely to be able to take time off with pay when they or a loved one are ill are those most commonly held by women and people of color.

No one should have to choose between the time they need to get well or the paycheck they need to make ends meet. When low-wage workers, people who are barely getting by as it is, have to make that choice, it's no wonder they choose to go to work sick. Sadly, the lack of paid time off is most common in fields that bring those sick workers in to contact with the public and with vulnerable populations--retail, restaurant and hospitality, child care, and elder care. In fact, 79% of food workers don't get paid sick days.<sup>ii</sup>

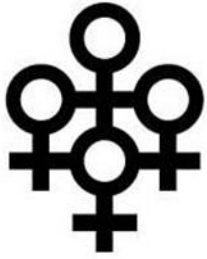
It's no wonder that illness spreads. The CDC attributes 70% of foodborne transmission of norovirus to infected food workers.<sup>iii</sup> Last week we learned that Maine has the highest rate of

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<sup>i</sup> *Legislation in Maine*. National Partnership for Women and Girls. 2017. Accessed at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/issues/work-family/family-friendly-america/maine.html>

<sup>ii</sup> *The Hands That Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities for Workers Along the Food Chain*. Food Chain Workers Alliance. 2012. Accessed at <http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> *Preventing Norovirus Outbreaks*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2014. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/norovirus/index.html>



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pertussis—Whooping Cough-- in the country.<sup>iv</sup> More than 3900 Mainers have tested positive for the flu so far this season, 336 have been hospitalized, 14 have died.<sup>v</sup> All of these are *preventable* diseases.

That's why 11 states, over 30 municipalities and the District of Columbia have adopted paid sick time laws.<sup>vi</sup>

The ability to earn paid time off when we are sick is just one more strategy to improve the well-being of those living on the edge. Like the minimum wage, it puts a few more dollars in the pockets of struggling workers, who spend their pay locally on food, rent, transportation and other necessities. That money circulates in the local economy.

Finally, if we decry domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, we should enact policies that allow victims to take the time they need to address it.

LD 369 is a reasonable proposal to allow workers to earn 1 hour of leave for every 30 worked, capped at 40 hours in a year. We would like to see it expanded to cover all workers, because the flu, norovirus and whooping cough don't care how many people you work with. We also feel the issue is so important that the effective date should be moved to September 2019.

We all get sick but being sick does not preclude us from needing to buy groceries, pay for child care, or make rent. We urge you to support Earned Paid Sick Leave for all Mainers. Thank you.

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<sup>iv</sup> *Maine's Whooping Cough Cases More Than Doubled in January*. Portland Press Herald. 2019. Accessed at <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/02/17/whooping-cough-rates-remain-high-in-maine/>

<sup>v</sup> *Influenza Weekly Surveillance Reports*. Maine Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2019. Accessed at <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/influenza/influenza-surveillance-weekly-updates.shtml>

<sup>vi</sup> *Paid Sick Days – State and District Statutes*. National Partnership for Women and Girls. 2019. Accessed at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-statutes.pdf>