



January 30, 2006

**Testimony of Marilyn P. Watkins, Ph.D., on House Bill 2777 and Senate Bill 6592,
Establishing Minimum Standards of Paid Sick Leave**

Good afternoon. I am Marilyn Watkins of the Economic Opportunity Institute. I also represent a large coalition of organizations supporting this bill, including labor unions, senior, women, children's advocacy and faith organizations.

40% of Washington's private sector workers have no paid sick leave. That is over 900,000 people in our state. Workers in restaurants, construction and retail are particularly unlikely to have paid sick leave according to the Department of Employment Security – all occupations where the consequences of workers going to work sick can be particularly harmful. Even in the health care field, 1/3 of firms do not provide sick leave.

Upper income workers are far more likely to have paid leave than lower income workers. A recent Urban Institute study found that middle income parents were nearly 2 times more likely to have paid leave than poor parents, and that low income parents who did have paid leave had significantly fewer days available to them.¹ A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2003 found that 2/3 of low income mothers lost pay when they had to stay home with a sick child, compared to 1/3 of middle and upper income mothers who lost pay when a child was sick.²

Local and national studies confirm that former welfare recipients who move initially into high-quality jobs that include employer provided benefits are almost twice as likely to stay employed than those who get jobs with poor pay and no benefits.³

Providing paid sick leave is not only good for public health, it is good for business too. Workers who must go to work ill or when in the midst of a family emergency can compromise both work place efficiency and safety. A number of studies have found that businesses which provide flexible paid leave policies for workers benefit from higher productivity and morale, reduced absenteeism, higher customer satisfaction, and lower turnover and training costs.⁴ Paid sick leave, in particular, has been found to be associated with higher profits.⁵

The United States is nearly alone among advanced economies in not guaranteeing both paid sick leave and annual vacations for all workers. At least 116 countries guarantee 10 or more paid sick days annually.⁶ Bills establishing minimum paid sick leave standards have been introduced in Congress, Massachusetts, Washington, DC, and Madison, Wisconsin.

Many businesses in every sector understand that it is better both for the community and for the bottom line to provide paid sick leave, and do so voluntarily.

The state already sets minimum standards for wages, child labor, and worker health and safety. These laws safeguard workers and the public, protect businesses from undercutting by unscrupulous competitors, and make our communities stronger.

It is time to set minimum standards for paid sick leave as well. I urge you to support HB 2777.

Thank you.

¹ Katherin Ross Phillips, "Getting Time Off: Access to Leave among Working Parents," The Urban Institute, April 2004, <http://www.urban.org/publications/310977.html>.

² Kaiser Family Foundation Brief, "Women, Work, and Family Health: A Balancing Act," April 2003, <http://www.kff.org/womenshealth/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=14293>.

³ Heather Boushey, "Staying Employed After Welfare: Work supports and job quality vital to employment tenure and wage growth," Economic Policy Institute, 2002. In this study, $\frac{3}{4}$ remained employed after two years if they had health benefits, which were used as a proxy for benefits generally, but only about 40% if they did not.

⁴ Jane Waldfogel, "The Impact of the Family Medical Leave Act," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 18, Spring 1999; ; Families and Work Institute, Business Work-Life Study, 1998, <http://www.familiesandwork.org/summary/worklife.pdf>; James S. Boles, et al, "An Investigation into the Inter-Relationships of Work-Family Conflict, Family-Work Conflict, and Work Satisfaction," *Journal of Managerial Issues*, vol. XIII, No. 1, Fall 2001; Thomas F. Casey and Karen Warlin, "Retention and Customer Satisfaction," *Compensation & Benefits Review*, May/June 2001.

⁵ Christine Siegwarth Meyer, et al, "Work-Family Benefits: Which Ones Maximize Profits?" *Journal of Managerial Issues*, vol. XIII, No. 1, Spring 2001: 28-44.

⁶ Jody Heymann, et al, "The Work Family, and Equity Index: Where Does the United States Stand Globally?" Global Working Families, June 2004, www.globalworkingfamilies.org.