



**Testimony of Marilyn Watkins, Ph.D.  
on HB 2508 Establishing minimum standards for sick and safe leave from employment,  
House Labor and Workforce Development Committee, January 25, 2012**

Thank you, Representative Sells and members of the Committee for hearing this important piece of legislation.

You've already heard how important paid sick leave is for the economic security and health of Washington's workers, families and businesses. I want to add some additional data and context.

About 1 million workers in Washington receive no paid sick leave now. When Seattle's new sick leave ordinance goes into effect in September, there will still be about 850,000 workers in the state without access to paid leave – many of them working directly with the public in restaurants, retail, and health care.

A recent survey of food service workers reported in the Journal of Food Protection found that 19.8% had worked while experiencing vomiting or diarrhea in the past year.<sup>1</sup> Another survey of over 4,300 restaurant workers in 8 metropolitan regions of the U.S. found that 88% did not receive paid sick time and 63% had worked serving or preparing food while sick.<sup>2</sup>

Well-paid professionals typically get paid sick leave along with other benefits, while those who can least afford to take time off without pay have the least access. Nationally, over 80% of people who earn above the median hourly wage get paid sick leave, while only 19% do among the bottom 10% of earners.<sup>3</sup> Part-time workers are also far less likely to receive paid leave, disproportionately impacting women and those with primary responsibility for family care.

The inequities extend to children as well. Ask any school nurse which kids are languishing sick and miserable in her office because no family member can get off work to pick them up. When parents lack paid sick leave it also means they have difficulty scheduling doctor's appointments to manage chronic conditions and help keep their children healthy. Making ample provision for the education of all children includes establishing policies that enable all children to thrive.

Minimum standards for paid sick leave are in effect in San Francisco, Washington, DC, and Connecticut. San Francisco's standards cover the entire workforce, and have been in place for 5 years – since February 2007.

The data are clear. San Francisco has done as well as or better than the surrounding counties in job and business growth over that period. Although most workers in San Francisco can earn up to 9 days, the average taken is 3, and ¼ of workers report taking no leave in the previous year. Moreover, the agency responsible for enforcement reports minimal costs.

Adopting paid sick leave standards is a common sense measure that will help restore economic security for Washington residents, improve health, and reduce the rising cost of health care to the state.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Sumner, Laura Green Brown, et al., "Factors Associated with Food Workers Working while Experiencing Vomiting or Diarrhea, *Journal of Food Protection*, Vol. 74, No 2., 2011, pp. 215-220.

<sup>2</sup> Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, *Serving While Sick: High Risks and Low Benefits for Nation's Restaurant Workforce, and Their Impact on the Consumer*, September 30, 2010, [http://www.rocunited.org/files/roc\\_servingwhilesick\\_v06%20%281%29.pdf](http://www.rocunited.org/files/roc_servingwhilesick_v06%20%281%29.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employee Benefits in the United States, National Compensation Survey*, March 2010, <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/>.