

Issue: PA Worker Rights

Talking Points: Paid Sick Leave

The United States is the only developed country without universal paid sick leave laws. Millions of workers face an unbearable choice—go to work when sick or stay home with no pay. Studies have shown that even low-margin businesses can thrive while offering paid sick leave. In the middle of a pandemic, it is clear that corporate benefits and public health are intertwined; lack of a healthy workforce harms businesses.

Democrats Promote Paid Sick Leave, Republicans Push Back

Pittsburgh and Philadelphia have passed paid sick leave laws in the past few years, despite pushback from some industries. Although there is widespread support for state-wide paid sick leave, Republicans push preemption laws making it illegal for some cities or counties to mandate paid sick leave. (Whether or not localities can pass local labor laws depends on how their governing charter is set up.)

Opponents of paid sick tend to be conservative lawmakers or organizations who desire minimal regulations on businesses, including those that benefit public health.

In 2019, Pennsylvania Democrats introduced three bills (SB 13, HB 169 and HB 998) for statewide paid sick leave. Republican-led committees put all on hold indefinitely.

Paid Sick Leave Benefits Workers and Businesses

Paid sick leave prevents the spread of disease, lowers healthcare burdens and costs, and promotes overall well-being. For example, paid sick leave results in:

- Fewer emergency room visits, which drive up insurance costs.
- Increased visits for preventive care for employees and their family, which leads to fewer prolonged illnesses and fewer days off.
- Improved morale, increased productivity, and less job turnover.

Studies show employers who paid for sick leave experienced minimal costs and burdens.

COVID-19 Makes Sick Leave More Crucial

The federal stimulus package instituted national paid sick leave—temporarily and with exclusions:

- Small companies with fewer than 50 employees can file for an exemption due to school closings or childcare unavailability if the leave requirements would jeopardize business viability. In Pennsylvania, 95% of businesses qualify as a small company.
- Companies with greater than 500 employees are exempt.
- Independent contractors are excluded.
- Health care providers and emergency responders can be excluded at the Labor Secretary's discretion.