



**Written Testimony of the  
American Association of University Women**

For the

**United States Senate House Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections**

Hearing on

**“H.R. 2339, the Family Income to Respond to Significant Transitions Act,  
and H.R. 2460, the Healthy Families Act”**

**June 11, 2009**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the hearing “H.R. 2339, the Family Income to Respond to Significant Transitions Act, and H.R. 2460, the Healthy Families Act.”

Founded in 1881, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) is a membership organization founded in 1881 with approximately 100,000 members and 1300 branches nationwide. AAUW has a proud 127-year history of breaking through educational and economic barriers for women and girls, and continues its mission today through education, research, and advocacy. AAUW believes that creating work environments that help employees balance the responsibilities of work and family is good public policy. In fact, AAUW’s member-adopted Public Policy Program is committed to “greater availability of and access to benefits and policies that create a family-friendly workplace environment,” which are critical for women to achieve “equitable access and advancement in employment.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and a patchwork of state laws and employer-based benefits – many of which AAUW members helped to pass – family and personal sick leave remain elusive to many working Americans. Further, despite the relative wealth of the United States, our family-oriented workplace policies lag dramatically and embarrassingly behind those in much of the rest of the world, including all high-income countries and many middle- and low-income countries as well.<sup>2</sup>

While American workplace policies have lagged, the past fifty years has seen substantial changes in the composition of the American workforce. Two-thirds (64 percent) of women with children under six are in the labor force.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, 22.9 million families provide care for an adult family member or friend, and nearly 80 percent of those care recipients are over the age of 50.<sup>4</sup>

It's clear that new and unique solutions are necessary to meet the increasing demands of families and the necessary obligations of work.

### **Employees Need Paid Sick Days, Especially Women**

AAUW has long supported flexible workplace policies to address the family responsibilities of employees. Offering workers the option of taking time off when they or a family member is sick is not just good for families, it's good for business. At least 145 countries worldwide provide paid sick days, with 127 providing a week or more annually. More than 79 countries provide sickness benefits for at least 26 weeks or until recovery.<sup>5</sup>

But many hardworking Americans do not have access to the important benefit of paid sick leave. In fact, just under half (43 percent) of the private sector workforce has no paid sick days.<sup>6</sup> Low-wage workers are especially hard hit, with about half receiving no paid sick days.<sup>7</sup> In the industries that employ the most women – retail trade and accommodations/food service, which coincidentally have immense public health implications – almost 9 million women do not have paid sick days.<sup>8</sup> Further, 27 percent of low income women put off getting health care because they cannot take time off from work and 18 percent of women at all income levels face this situation.<sup>9</sup> More than 22 million working women do not have paid sick days,<sup>10</sup> and as a result half of working mothers report that they must miss work and often go without pay when caring for a sick child.<sup>11</sup>

Paid employment should not be at odds with family responsibilities. In fact, finding solutions so that the two roles might better coexist is in the best interest of businesses. Current models of benefits are out of touch with the realities of the 21st century workforce, where households are often headed by dual-earning couples out of necessity, or a single parent whose juggling act can be particularly difficult. Furthermore, elder care responsibilities affect nearly four in ten adults, and this number is likely to grow higher as nearly two-thirds of Americans under age 60 expect to be responsible for the care of an elderly relative in 2008.<sup>12</sup> But work is not a choice for the majority of Americans, and most cannot afford to forfeit their paycheck or their job when a family member is sick; the Healthy Families Act provides a reasonable solution to this everyday crisis faced by families nationwide.

### **The Healthy Families Act**

Without sick days, employees often come to work sick, decreasing productivity and infecting coworkers. We've seen increased attention to the community health issue during the recent H1N1 flu pandemic, with officials urging schools to close and workers presenting symptoms to stay home. The lack of available paid sick days forces families with children to confront difficult choices that impact not only their families but potentially their communities as well. Such decisions can become a catch-22. For the 86 million Americans who do not have paid sick days,<sup>13</sup> a decision to stay home to care for a sick child or family member jeopardizes their family income or even their job. In addition, employees themselves are unable to make smart decisions to stay home to prevent infecting others because they cannot go without a day's wages.

The Healthy Families Act would require employers with at least 15 or more employees to guarantee workers seven days of accrued paid sick leave annually. By ensuring that hard working Americans have access to a minimum number of paid sick days that can also be used to

care for sick dependents, employees will no longer have to make the difficult choices between caring for loved ones – or themselves – and losing much-needed income. In these challenging economic times, that decision is an especially difficult one for families to make.

In the 111th Congress, the Healthy Families Act was introduced with an important new provision. The bill's paid sick days would be available for use for treatment, recovery, and activities necessary to deal with an incidence of domestic violence. This includes, but is not limited to, activities such as filing a restraining order, making a court appearance, moving into a shelter, and seeking medical treatment. We know that the aftermath of domestic violence costs employers, at a minimum, between \$3 billion and \$5 billion annually in lost time and productivity.<sup>14</sup> And even more importantly, victims of intimate partner violence lose 8 million days of paid work each year.<sup>15</sup> Paid sick and safe days are a necessity to victims and AAUW supports this new provision in the bill.

Not only is offering paid sick days a positive step for businesses to stay in tune with the makeup and needs of the 21st century workforce, paid sick days produce savings for businesses through decreased turnover and increased productivity. The Institute for Women's Policy Research estimates that the Healthy Families Act would result in a net savings, after covering costs of paid leave, of \$8 billion per year. In addition, we are fortunate to be able to examine the policy already in place in San Francisco, where it was shown that implementing paid sick days resulted in a minor impact on employers and strong job growth in relation to the region.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

The Healthy Families Act is an important step for Congress to take to ensure that employees can more adequately balance the responsibilities of work and life. The demands of providing care for a sick family member should not force workers into an untenable decision between a paycheck or their job and the needs of a loved one. AAUW believes that the improvement of current benefits and family leave to include a basic minimum of paid sick days is critical to breaking through economic barriers for women, and will continue to work with Congress to pass the Healthy Families Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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<sup>1</sup> American Association of University Women. (July 2007). *2007 – 09 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from [http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue\\_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf](http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Hegewisch, Ariane and Janet Gornick. (May 2008). *Statutory Routes to Workplace Flexibility in Cross-National Perspective*. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved April 8, 2009 from <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B258workplaceflex.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Lowell, Vicky. Institute for Women's Policy Research. (May 2004). *No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B242.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (April 2004). *Executive Summary*. *Caregiving in the U.S.: Findings From the National Caregiver Survey*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://www.caregiving.org/data/04execsumm.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> The Institute for Health and Social Policy. (2007). *The Work, Family, and Equity Index: How Does the United States Measure Up?* Retrieved January 15, 2008, from <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/ihsp/WFEIFinal2007.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (August 2007). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States, March 2007*, Table 19. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/sp/ebsm0006.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (August 2007). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States, March 2007*, Table 19. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/sp/ebsm0006.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>10</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research. (February 2007). *Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being*. Retrieved January 15, 2008 from [http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B254\\_paidicksickdaysFS.pdf](http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B254_paidicksickdaysFS.pdf).
- <sup>11</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (April 2003). *Women, Work and Family Health: A Balancing Act*. Retrieved January 15, 2008 from <http://www.kff.org/womenshealth/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=14293>.
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- <sup>13</sup> Lovell, Vicky. (May 2004). *No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave*. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Accessed January 5, 2008 from <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B242.pdf>.
- <sup>14</sup> Bureau of Nat'l Aff., Special Rep. No. 32, *Violence and Stress: The Work/Family Connection 2* (1990).
- <sup>15</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States* (2003).
- <sup>16</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research. (October 2008). *Job Growth Strong with Paid Sick Days*. Retrieved May 6, 2009 from [www.iwpr.org/pdf/B264\\_JobGrowth.pdf](http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B264_JobGrowth.pdf).