

Adopt Paid Sick Leave for Kin Care and Safe Days for Working Parents with Young Children

Keeping infants and toddlers healthy is of utmost importance to families, yet young children in child care or school often catch illnesses in these settings and it falls on the child's parent to juggle work and family responsibilities. Limited access to paid time off, such as sick leave, can compromise a parent's ability to maintain stable employment and earn enough income to adequately provide for a family.¹ Many North Carolinians don't have access to paid sick days that will enable them to take time off when needed without jeopardizing their family's economic security. A national poll on children's health conducted by the University of Michigan found that many working parents are not able to use the sick days they earn because workplace policies prohibit employees from using sick days to care for sick family members or to address problems related to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. As a result, parents reported that if they choose to stay home to care for a sick child they may lose their job.²

The Think Babies NC Alliance believes that all North Carolina workers should have the right to use their sick days (whether paid or job-protected unpaid) to care for a sick loved one, seek preventative care, or deal with the physical, mental, or legal impacts of domestic violence. Now is the time to create a statewide standard to ensure all workers and families of young children, no matter where they live or work, have access to paid sick time to keep themselves, their children, their families and their communities healthy.

To address this issue, Governor Cooper extended safe days to state employees under his purview via executive action in 2019.³ Several other states have also included kin care and safe days provisions in their sick days laws.⁴ For example, the state of Georgia passed the Family Care Act⁵ several years ago with bipartisan support allowing workers the right to use earned sick time to care for family members.

What do we mean by “Kin Care” and “Safe Days”?

Kin Care: Access to sick leave to obtain preventative care or to stay home and care for a sick child or family member.

Safe Days: Access to sick leave in order to seek assistance related to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) such as domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking affecting the employee or a family member.

Why Is This Important to Do Now?

Working families need paid sick leave for kin care and safe days.

Currently 1.6 million North Carolinian workers – 38% of our state's workforce – do not have the ability to access paid sick days at all.⁶ The ability to take time off to care for a sick child, seek preventative care, or recover from a short-term illness is critical to family economic security in a state where 65% of children live in households where all available parents are currently working.⁷ About 44% of North Carolina mothers are the sole or primary breadwinner for their families, earning at least half of their total household income, and

an additional 21% of mothers are co-breadwinners.⁸ Many families struggle to make ends meet when they have to take unpaid leave, and others cannot afford to take any unpaid time at all. For a typical family without paid sick days, 3.3 days of pay lost due to illness are equivalent to the family's entire monthly health care budget, and 2.7 days are equivalent to its entire monthly grocery budget.⁹

Access to paid leave currently varies by race and income level.

Black, Hispanic, and Native American workers, as well as low income workers in general, are overrepresented amongst those who currently lack access to paid sick leave. In NC, 68% of those in the lowest earnings bracket do not have access to any paid sick days.¹⁰ Workers in frequently low-paying jobs, such as food preparation, personal home care, and childcare are among the least likely to have access and the most likely to be unable to afford an unpaid day away from work. People of color are overrepresented in low-wage work, resulting in a lack of access to paid sick days that disproportionately exposes Black and Latinx workers to increased risk of illness and increased racial health disparities.¹¹ Nearly half (48%) of Latinx workers and more than one-third (36%) of Black workers report having no paid time away from work.¹²



Ability to use sick days to care for children improves health and well-being.

The benefits of parents having access to sick days and the ability to use them to care for their children are clear. Research shows that sick children have more trouble learning, while healthy children miss fewer days of school and experience fewer behavioral challenges.¹³ Children whose parents are able to earn paid sick days are 12.5 percent more likely to receive flu vaccinations, 13 percent more likely to receive their annual checkups, have better maintenance of chronic illnesses and are less likely to receive delayed vaccinations.¹⁴ In addition, parents who are able to care for their sick child at home find that their children recover better and have shorter hospital stays.¹⁵

Paid sick leave prevents the spread of illness and is critically-needed during COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

A recent study from researchers at Cornell University and the Swiss Economic Institute found that states with new access to paid leave during the COVID-19 pandemic have seen 400 fewer cases of infection per day, further underscoring that paid sick leave is one of the best tools for slowing the spread of the virus and combating the pandemic.¹⁶ This is consistent with previous research that showed that increasing sick leave coverage causally reduces the spread of the flu.¹⁷ According to the Center for Disease Control, adults have an average of 2 to 3 colds every year, and children have even more.¹⁸ Even in typical times of health and economic conditions, research has shown that employees who lack paid sick leave are more likely to go to work sick, have financial hardships, skip preventive health care, and spread contagious diseases.¹⁹

Safe Leave allows parents time to seek and obtain needed supports.

In addition, to paid sick leave for kin care, paid *safe leave* allows for parents of young children to be able to seek refuge from dangerous situations like those resulting from Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), child abuse or maltreatment. Studies cited by the NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence estimate that 3.3 - 10 million children nationwide witness domestic violence each year.²⁰ The NC Census of Domestic Violence Services found that over 1,500 people receive domestic violence services *each and every day* in our state.²¹ Research has documented special developmental challenges that can emerge for very young children who witness or have experienced abuse or neglect.²² Children ages zero to three experience abuse or neglect at disproportionately high rates—representing nearly 27 percent of all maltreatment victims, despite comprising only 16 percent of the overall child population.²³ Paid safe leave allows families to have time away

from work so that they can seek out and receive necessary mental and physical health intervention and treatment as well as seek legal protections.

Businesses benefit by offering employees flexibility in paid leave.

Sick leave for kin care or safe leave benefits businesses as well as families. Workplace policies that support the realities of balancing work and family help with labor force participation, productivity, morale, retention, and more.²⁴ NC employees think employers who are family-friendly have a competitive advantage, according to a study of 300 NC employers and 300 employees. Seventy-three percent of NC employees report that they would be more committed to their employers if they had more family-friendly practices. Ninety-four percent say family-friendly policies help businesses attract and retain talent. This sentiment is shared by employers as well. Seventy-one percent of employers think family-friendly policies have a positive impact on their organization, and those who've incorporated them see the positive benefits firsthand.²⁵



Think Babies™ NC Alliance

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance seeks to ensure that North Carolina's youngest children, prenatal to age 3, benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding so that all children have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences.

For more information:

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- ³ Governor Cooper Signs Safe Days Executive Directive: <https://governor.nc.gov/news/governor-cooper-signs-%E2%80%9Csafe-days%E2%80%9D-executive-directive>
- ⁴ Kin care and safe days laws around the country: <https://www.abetterbalance.org/paid-sick-time-laws/?export>
- ⁵ GA Family Care Act: <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20172018/SB/201>
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