

## Issue Paper

# Paid Sick Leave: a National Priority

*The Jewish Labor Committee, a sponsor of the resolution below, is a founding member of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, a network of 14 national and 125 local independent partner agencies that serves as a catalyst to “heighten community awareness, encourages civic and social involvement, and deliberates key issues of importance to the Jewish community.” The JLC helped secure this resolution’s adoption at the JCPA’s Town Hall Town Hall Plenum in October, 2015, in Washington, DC.*

The rights of workers have long been a bedrock social justice concern and a priority of American Jews. With strong Jewish leadership, major achievements such as the minimum wage, the forty hour work week, the abolition of child labor, and family and medical leave have enhanced the quality of life for millions over successive generations.

This commitment is inspired by Jewish tradition that speaks strongly to valuing workers’ dignity as well as maintaining healthy families. We are taught in the Torah, “You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt.” (Deut. 24:14-15).

The landmark 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act recognized the familial needs that tug at every worker. But neither this nor any other federal law requires employers to continue to pay workers during their family or medical leave. By supporting paid sick leave we hope to ensure that no one must choose between their health or the health of a family member and their financial security.

The United States lags far behind the rest of the world when it comes to paid sick leave, with only four states, 19 cities, and one county currently requiring it. Meanwhile, 163 nations already guarantee paid sick leave, including Canada, Israel, and nearly every country in Europe. Of the European countries that guarantee paid sick leave, all guarantee more than 11 days.

### **The Jewish Council for Public Affairs believes:**

- ◆ Lack of paid sick days not only raises issues of job security and worker justice, but issues of public health as well. Workers who interact with the public

every day —among them food and public accommodation workers, as well as workers in child care centers and nursing homes—disproportionately lack paid sick days. Workers without access to paid sick days are 50 percent more likely to report to work while sick than their counterparts with paid sick days. Lack of paid sick leave therefore increases the risk of spreading disease, often to those most vulnerable: children, the sick, and the elderly.

- ◆ Paid sick days are of particular importance to women who are over-represented in low-wage jobs (typically lacking such leave) and are most likely to act as the family’s primary caregiver as well as the one most responsible for handling doctors’ appointments and followup care for their children.
- ◆ Paid sick days standards have been proven to help businesses reduce turnover and improve worker productivity. The costs of replacing workers, including advertising positions, interviewing, and training replacements, are often greater than the cost of paid sick time to retain existing workers. Since 2007, a year after San Francisco implemented a paid sick days law, job growth has been consistently higher in San Francisco than in neighboring counties that lack a comparable law.

### **The community relations field should:**

- ◆ Support and advocate for legislation that guarantees employees reasonable paid sick leave to attend to their own health and the health of their families;
- ◆ Build coalitions and engage in campaigns to support paid sick days; and
- ◆ Urge our own local and national agencies to examine their employment and contracting practices to implement the goals of this resolution and set an example for their communities.

# Jewish Labor Committee

*The Jewish voice in the labor movement, and  
the voice of the labor movement in the Jewish community.*

Founded in 1934, the Jewish Labor Committee was formed to mobilize unions, Jewish organizations and mutual aid societies across North America to help fight Nazism in Germany. The JLC supported anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist forces throughout Europe, and aided Jewish, trade union and democratic socialist leaders targeted by the Nazis.

Today, the JLC brings together the organized labor movement and the organized Jewish community to promote workers' rights, civil rights and human rights in the workplace and the community-at-large; to combat anti-Semitism and all other forms of prejudice; to strengthen the historic relationship between American and Israeli trade unions, and to promote a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Aware of the key role that the labor movement can play to combat income inequality, the JLC mobilizes support in the Jewish community for union activities across the U.S. in support of hotel workers, public school teachers, carwashers, employees at big box stores such as Walmart, domestic workers and all others fighting for dignity, security and representation on the job. We are also active in working to increase the minimum wage on the federal and state levels, securing passage of earned sick days legislation, as well as fair and comprehensive national immigration reform.

Together with our partners and supporters, the JLC is committed to creating a fairer and more just society for all.

*Jewish Labor Committee is an IRS-registered 501 (C) (3) non-profit organization (ID: 13-1675650)*

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