



February 13, 2014

Doctors Council SEIU Testimony
in Support of Legislation to Expand Earned Sick Time Act

I would like to thank Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Viverito, Council Member Chin, members of the Civil Service and Labor Committee, and all of the other City Council members for convening this hearing to review the expansion of the City's Earned Sick Time Act.

We applaud Mayor de Blasio, the City Council, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and all the coalitions and groups for championing this important issue.

I am Dr. Frank Proscia, President of Doctors Council SEIU. We are a union for doctors and voice for patients.

We represent doctors throughout the country, including in New York City hospitals and clinics. Our members everyday see New Yorkers who have to make choices and deal with consequences. We see them as patients in our ERs and clinics. No one should have to choose between going to work or caring for yourself or a loved one.

Everyone gets sick, but unfortunately, not everyone can afford to. The U.S. Bureau of Labor estimates that up to 79% of low-wage workers in America do not have access to short term paid sick leave, and in New York City it's estimated that over one and a half million New Yorkers can't call in sick without losing out on valuable income.

Health care is a basic human right. As Martin Luther King, Jr. stated in a speech to the Medical Committee for Human Right: "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

Working families, who make up the majority of our city's residents, should not have to choose between working sick to make ends meet, or staying home to care for themselves or a sick family member.

This is a patient care issue.

If someone is sick themselves or a family member is ill, you should have the ability to take a sick day to get better or take yourself or a family member to see a doctor. You should not have to fear losing your job. If untreated or not seen earlier in time, an illness can get worse and become more acute. Then, a patient will enter the health care system at a later point in time, with a higher acuity that may be more difficult to remedy and that will end up costing more to treat than if seen earlier.

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We applaud the Mayor's expedited plan through Introduction Number 1, to expand paid sick leave to employers with five or more employees and urge this Committee and the full City Council to rapidly pass this legislation.

We fully agree that New Yorkers need meaningful paid sick leave legislation that will protect working people and ensure that their jobs and families are protected in case of illness. .

Beyond addressing the important concern of economic fairness, the question of paid sick leave is a major public health issue.

Sick workers should stay home; not place their coworkers and clients or customers at risk of infection. Similarly, sick children need to be at home, not at child care and school, where they readily spread illness to other children and to their teachers.

For example, in 2009 the Institute for Women's Public Research reported that employees who attended work while infected with H1N1 (swine flu) are estimated to have caused the infection of as many as 7 million co-workers (this is according to data compiled by IWPR from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Bureau of Labor Statistics).

This is also an issue of critical importance to women workers, who are the least likely to have paid sick leave, and who need it the most, since they provide most of the caregiving responsibilities in their homes.

The thriving local economies of Seattle, San Francisco, and other major American cities that have embraced paid sick leave for all, should illustrate that paid sick leave promotes a healthy and productive workforce, and in turn a robust local economy.

It is our hope that this year, the City Council will act expeditiously and approve the expanded Earned Sick Time Act, for the public health and betterment of all working people in New York.

About Doctors Council SEIU

Doctors Council SEIU, a professional organization for doctors, is the oldest and largest union of attending physicians and dentists in the United States, with members in New York City, and in states across the country. Formed in 1973, Doctors Council SEIU is a national union for doctors and a voice for patients, and represents attending physicians and dentists at Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) facilities and hospitals, including doctors employed by the affiliates New York University School of Medicine, the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and the Physician Affiliate Group of New York (PAGNY). HHC is the largest public hospital system in the nation. Doctors Council SEIU also represents doctors in the New York City Mayoral agencies including the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) as well as doctors working at Rikers Island, the largest correctional facility in the nation. Affiliated with SEIU, Doctors Council SEIU is a national union representing doctors employed in the public and private sectors.