

***Paid Sick Days:  
Attitudes and Experiences***

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# Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences

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## Public Opinion on Paid Sick Days

Except in a few localities, employers are not required by law to provide paid sick days for workers. But most Americans believe that paid sick days should be a worker's right guaranteed by the government. As Table 1A shows, 69% indicates that having paid sick days is "very important" for workers.<sup>1</sup> Among workplace standards that are widely recognized under state and federal laws, this level of importance is lower than the 85% who say workplace-safety regulations are very important and the 78% rating family and maternity leave as very important, on par with the 69-70% saying a minimum wage and time-and-a-half pay for overtime are very important, and much higher than the 43-46% considering the right to join a union and maximum hour limits as very important.

As Table 1B indicates, substantial majorities of all socio-demographic and political groups considers paid sick days a very important worker's right. Solid majorities of all socio-demographics say that paid sick days are very important. Paid sick days are scored more highly by women than men (78% vs. 61% very important), by African Americans rather than other racial and ethnic groups (87% vs. 60-70%), by those with low incomes vs. high incomes (77% vs. 71%), by those with less than a high school education vs. a graduate-level college degree (84% vs. 68%), and by unmarried parents (i.e. never married, widowed, separated, or divorced and with a child in the household under 18) than by those in other types of families (81% vs. 67-72%).

Politically, majorities of both Democrats and Republicans consider paid sick days as very important. Democrats do consider paid sick days as more important than Republicans do. Strong Democrats rate paid sick days as more important than strong Republicans do (85% to 64%).

Similarly, Table 2A indicates that on a 0-10 scale, 43% gives paid sick days the highest rating of a 10 as a "basic worker's right". Fully 75% rate paid sick days a 6 or higher as a basic worker's right.

Table 2B shows that majorities of all socio-demographic and political groups agree that paid sick days are a basic worker's right (6-10 on 10-point scale). Most of the same sub-group differences that appeared on the importance measure (Table 1B) again appear here. Women are more supportive than men are (87% to 65%). African Americans led other groups on workers' rights (95% to 68-80%). Those with low incomes exceed those with high incomes (90% to 70%) as a worker's right. Of those with less than a high school education, 87% rated as a worker's right vs. 68-72% with four-years of college or more. More of those not currently married with a child at home considered it a basic worker's right than other family types did (93% vs. 73-77%).

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<sup>1</sup> On the survey methodology, see Appendix 1.

Politically, Democrats are more supportive than Republicans are (Strong Democrats at 93% vs. Strong Republicans at 64%).

Following from this high endorsement of paid sick days as a basic worker's right, large majorities support paid-sick-days legislation. Fully 75% favors a law that guarantees paid sick days for all workers (Table 3A). When specific plans are described that mention the number of paid sick days to be required by law, the level of support is similar. Asked about a law that would give full-time workers up to nine paid sick days per year, it is endorsed by 70% and 86% backed a similar plan calling for up to seven paid sick days per year (Table 4). Likewise, a plan that calls for part-time workers receiving a pro-rated amount of paid sick days is favored by 71% for nine days and 77% for seven days (Table 5). Thus, strong majorities both favor specific plans as well as the general idea of requiring paid sick days.

Substantial majorities of all socio-demographic and political groups support legislation requiring paid sick days for workers (Table 3B). Support is higher among women than men (88-64%). African Americans are the top backers with less support from those in other groups (90% vs. 56-77%). Backing declines with income from 80-83% for those earning less than \$50,000 a year to 73% for those earning \$80,000+. Educational differences are quite variable, with no clear pattern. Unmarried parents are more supportive than those in other types of families (85% vs. 74-78%).

Politically, legislation is backed by majorities of both Democrats and Republicans (by 89% of strong Democrats vs. 59% of strong Republicans).

People are divided about how to apply paid-sick-days requirements to smaller employers (less than 15 employees). Many people support some concessions to smaller employers, but the exact nature and extent of the modification depend on how the issue is presented to people.

First, 67% favors a plan that would require employers with less than 15 employees to offer just six paid sick days rather than the nine days that larger employers would have to provide (Table 6). Similarly, 63-72% favor a plan that would permit smaller employers to offer five paid sick days rather than the seven days required of larger employers (Tables 7A and 7B).

Second, when people are asked if smaller employers should be exempted from providing paid sick days, the public is evenly divided with 50% supporting a small-employer exemption and 49% opposing it (Table 8). The public's position on exempting smaller employers is clarified by a second question that shows that while 33% believe that smaller employees should provide that same number of paid sick days as larger employers, more (47%) back having smaller employers provide "some, but fewer" paid sick days than the number that larger employers are required to provide (Table 9). Thus, 80% want even small employers to provide some paid sick days and only 17% support having smaller employers provide no paid sick days (Table 9).

Ultimately, the public is about evenly split on whether a small-employer exemption would increase or decrease support for paid-sick-days legislation with 49% reporting it would boost their support, 48% that it would lower support, and 3% unsure (Table 10).

Many employers give their employees "paid time off" or PTO that combines together time off for all reasons rather than having separate accounts for sick leave, vacation, and other reasons. The public is quite divided as to whether PTO would fulfill paid-sick-days requirements (Table 11). Thus, 55% favors having employers giving at least nine days of PTO being exempted from having to also provide paid sick days, while 44% opposes this exception. Likewise, 45% said that if PTO covered at least nine days, employers should still be "required to provide

separate paid sick days,” 52% thought “they should be excused from providing” paid sick days, and 3% had no opinion (Table 11).

The high level of support for paid sick days converts into political capital with 47% saying that a candidate backing such legislation would make them more likely to vote for him/her and just 14% indicating that they would be less likely to vote for the candidate. An additional 39% responded that a candidate’s position on paid sick days would not make them more or less likely to vote for him/her and 1% was unsure (Table 12A). This is a net gain of 33 percentage points for pro-paid-sick-days candidates. On the other hand, supporting an exemption for smaller employers loses support for a candidate with 18% indicating they would be more likely to vote for a candidate backing an exemption, 36% saying it would make them less likely to back such a candidate, and 45% reporting it won’t make a difference (Table 13). This is a net loss of -18 percentage points,

People evaluated seven pro-paid-sick-days arguments and seven anti-paid-sick-days arguments. As Table 14 shows, a majority found five of the seven pro-statements to be “very convincing” and 64-81% said the arguments were at least somewhat convincing. The top six arguments had 71-81% rating them as very or somewhat convincing and consisted of statements about excessive compensation to CEOs, protecting public health, improving worker productivity, helping working families, workers not being in a position to lose a day’s wage due to illness in today’s economy, and all employees getting paid sick days if executives did. (See Table 14 for the full text of the statements.) Only the argument about most other countries requiring paid sick days was found to be notably less compelling and even it was seen as very or somewhat convincing by 64%.<sup>2</sup> On average people found 3.5 statements to be very convincing and 51% found at least four supporting arguments to be very convincing.

In contrast, only about a third found any of the arguments against paid sick days to be very convincing (21-35%) and only 44-62% found them at least somewhat convincing (Table 15). The statement found most convincing was about employee abuse of sick days (62% very+somewhat). This was followed by small businesses being hurt by the requirement (59%), government mandates adding burdens to businesses (51%), businesses not being able to handle the costs in the current weak economy (51%), government regulation hurting growth and free enterprise (51%), employers making off-setting cutbacks in wages and/or other benefits (48%), and losing jobs to overseas competition (44%). (See Table 15 for the full text of the statements.) Altogether people found 1.9 anti-statements very convincing and 24% found four or more opposing arguments to be very convincing.

Overall, people accepted as very convincing 3.5 pro-statements vs. only 1.9 con-statements and the least convincing pro-statement (on the practices of other countries) was seen as almost as compelling as the most influential anti-statement (on employee abuse).

After evaluating the seven pro-statements and seven con-statements, people were again asked whether they supported paid-sick-days legislation. At this point 74% backed the measure (Table 16). This was essentially unchanged from the 75% that backed the measure before the issues were discussed (Table 3).

Support was strongly related to what arguments people found convincing. Those strongly favoring requiring paid sick days found 4.8 pro-arguments to be very convincing, for those somewhat favoring said 2.4 pro-arguments were very convincing, for somewhat opposed it was

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<sup>2</sup> For a cross-national comparison of labor laws including paid sick days see Jody Heymann and Alison Earle, Raising the Global Floor: Dismantling the Myth that We Can’t Afford Good Working Conditions for Everyone. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

1.5 arguments, and for strongly opposed it was 1.3 arguments. In terms of anti-paid-sick-days arguments, among those strongly in favor law 1.5 anti-arguments were considered to be very convincing, among those somewhat favoring 1.4 anti-arguments were very convincing, among the somewhat opposed 2.2 anti-arguments were very convincing, and among the strongly opposed 4.0 anti-arguments were rated as very convincing.

Also after the pro- and anti-arguments were presented, people were asked about their support for candidates who either supported or opposed paid-sick-days legislation. As Table 17 shows, if a candidate supported paid sick days, 33% said this would not change their likelihood of voting for him/her, for 42% it would increase their likelihood of voting for, and for 24% it would decrease their likelihood of voting for him/her. Thus, the net gain to the pro-paid sick-days candidate was 18 percentage points. When asked about a candidate who opposed paid sick days, 36% said this would not affect their likelihood of voting for the candidate, 20% said it would increase the likely of voting for him/her, and 43% said it would decrease their likelihood of support (Table 17). Thus, the net loss to an anti-paid-sick-days candidate was -23 percentage points. These results are consistent and largely symmetrical, but possibly suggest that an anti-paid-sick-days candidate would lose even more than a pro-paid-sick-days candidate would gain (-23 points vs. +18 points).

As with support for legislation, backing a candidate was closely related to which arguments were found most convincing. Those much more likely to vote for a pro-paid-sick-days candidate found 5.2 pro-arguments and only 1.7 anti-arguments to be very convincing. Those much less likely to vote for a pro-paid-sick-days candidate accepted as very convincing 2.0 pro- and 4.1 anti-arguments. Similarly, among those much more likely to vote for an anti-paid-sick-days candidate, 3.0 anti- and 3.6 pro-arguments were very convincing. Among those much less likely to vote for a candidate opposed to paid sick days, they found 5.3 pro- and 1.1 anti-arguments to be very convincing.

As Table 12B shows, pluralities and often majorities in almost all socio-demographic groups indicate that if a candidate endorsed paid-sick-days legislation this would increase their likelihood of voting for him/her. This is true both before and after the pro- and anti-arguments were offered. The presenting of arguments on both sides of the issue does not materially alter the sub-group patterns. After hearing the pro and con arguments being more likely to vote for a candidate favoring paid sick days than his/her opponent is greater among women than men (59% vs. 39%), strong Democrats than strong Republicans (71% vs. 36%), those with less than a high school education than those with at least a four-year college degree (55% vs. 48-49%), part-time employees vs. the retired or full-time (60% vs. 45%), and unmarried parents vs. those in other types of families (57% vs. 46-51%).<sup>3</sup>

## Experiences Related to Paid Sick Days

About 64% of all workers report they are eligible for paid sick days from their employer (including those receiving paid-time-off days). This is lower than the proportion covered by employer-based health-care insurance (81%), dental-care insurance (72%), life insurance (68%),

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<sup>3</sup> For similar results on attitudes towards paid sick days in 2007-2009 from the states of California, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Ohio see Tom W. Smith, "Paid Sick Days: A Basic Labor Standard for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Chicago: NORC, 2008; [www.ncsickdays.org/aarppoll](http://www.ncsickdays.org/aarppoll); and Chad S. Novak, Tracy A. Fowler, and Andrew E. Smith, "Granite State Poll for the New Hampshire Women's Alliance," University of New Hampshire Survey Center, July, 2009.

and pensions (67%), about the same as those having flexible work schedules (65%), and higher than for parental leave with full re-employment rights (61%)(Table 18). Based on a similar 2008 survey, it is also higher than those receiving bonuses (34%), or childcare assistance (14%).<sup>4</sup>

While 64% of workers report being eligible for paid sick days, only 47% of workers receive paid sick days that they can use either for their own illnesses or to care for sick family members, 36% have paid sick days specifically rather than just PTO days, and only 28% have paid sick days rather than just PTO and can use it both for their own illnesses or to care for their children and family members. Of those receiving separate paid sick days, 9% got three days a year or less, 27 % had 4-7 days, and 64% received 8 or more days. Among those receiving PTO 58% received 10 days or less. This means that allowing just for two weeks for vacation and other days away from work, most workers under PTO plans have no extra days to cover personal or family illnesses or any other necessities.

About 88% of government employees get paid sick days vs. 60% in the private sector.<sup>5</sup> Only 40% of the self-employed have coverage. Among employers with less than 15 workers 42% get paid sick days, this increases to 58% for employers with 15-499 workers, and 81% for those with 500+ workers. As Table 19 shows, eligibility for paid sick days is lower among part-time workers than full-time workers (24% vs. 73%), among women than men (57% vs. 71%), among Hispanics rather than non-Hispanics (51% vs. 63-86%), among those with less income than among the higher income groups (30% vs. 82%), among those with less education vs. the college educated (less than high school: 11% vs. those with a post graduate degree: 76%), and among the not married than among the married (52% vs. 71%).<sup>6</sup>

Because of the limited extent of paid-sick-days coverage and the limited number of paid sick days available even when some coverage exists, workers are often penalized by employers when time off is needed to deal with personal or family illnesses. As Table 20 shows, 12% indicates that they or a family member have been fired, suspended or otherwise punished for taking time off for an illness, 16% have lost a job for this reason, 11% have been told that they would be fired, suspended, or otherwise punished if they missed work due to a personal or family illness, and 14% indicated that they were told that they would lose their job if they took time off for a personal or family illness.<sup>7</sup> A total of 16% reported that they or a family member have been fired, suspended, or otherwise punished or told that they would be fired, suspended, or otherwise

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<sup>4</sup> Tom W. Smith, "Paid Sick Days: A Basic Labor Standard for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Chicago: NORC, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> The 2009 National Compensation Survey (NCS) found that 61% of employees in private industry and 89% in state and local governments received paid sick days. The NCS is a survey of employers by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and omits the self-employed and those in agriculture and some other industries (Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States, March 2009. Washington, DC: BLS, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Other research indicates that coverage is even lower in certain sectors such as restaurant workers, Restaurant Opportunities Center of Chicago, the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, and the Chicagoland Restaurant Industry Coalition, "Behind the Kitchen Door: The Hidden Costs of Taking the Low Road in Chicagoland's Thriving Restaurant Industry," 2010.

<sup>7</sup> While one might expect that more people would report that they or a family member had "ever been fired, suspended, written up or otherwise penalized by an employer for taking time off" than the number who had "lost a job for taking time off," this is not the case. This probably results because people think of losing a job more broadly than being fired. For example, it probably includes people who quit a job to recover from an illness or take care of an ill family member as well as those who were fired.

punished if they missed work due to illness and 23% indicated that they have lost a job or were told they would lose their job if they took time off due to personal or family illness.<sup>8</sup>

Given the frequent negative, work-related repercussions of personal and family illness ranging from loss of income to losing ones job, concern and dissatisfaction are high when workers are not eligible for paid sick days. As Table 21 shows, 55% are concerned about not having paid sick days (31% very and 24% fairly concerned) and 44% of those without paid sick days are dissatisfied about this aspect of their job vs. only 5% of those with paid sick days being dissatisfied. Only 46% of those without paid sick days were satisfied by that aspect of their job and just 19% were very satisfied with not having paid sick days.

### Public Health Repercussions of Lacking Paid Sick Days

Besides increasing concerns and dissatisfaction, not having paid sick days also leads to more employees with contagious illness showing up at work. As Table 22 indicates, 37% of those with paid sick days have gone to work with a contagious illness like the flu compared to 55% of those without paid sick days. Thus, not having paid sick days is associated with an 18 percentage point increase in ill employees spreading diseases at work.

The lack of paid sick days also puts other strains on the health care system and drives up the cost of health care. As Table 23 shows, 10% of those with paid sick days have sought care in a hospital emergency room because they “were unable to take off from work to get medical care during normal job hours,” while 20% of those without paid sick days had done so. Similarly, 7% of those without paid sick days took a family member to a hospital emergency room because they could not take off from work vs. 18% of those without paid sick days.<sup>9</sup>

It also increases the spread of disease in schools and daycare facilities. Among those with paid sick days, 14% have sent a sick child to school or daycare, while 24% of those without paid sick day have (Table 23).

Those without paid sick days are twice as likely as those with paid sick days to use hospital emergency rooms or send a sick child to school or daycare. Looking at these three behaviors together shows that one or more actions have been done by 21% of those with paid sick days compared to 42% of those without paid sick days, an increase of 21 percentage points.

### Trends in Attitudes, 2008-2010

Support for paid sick days decreased slightly from 2008 to 2010. The largest decline was in backing for general measures. As Table 24 indicates across eight items support declined by an average of 7 points. People also found pro-arguments a little less convincing (-4.8 points) and anti-arguments a bit more convincing (-3.4 points).<sup>10</sup> There were no meaningful changes in attitudes regarding the treatment of small businesses (average of - 1.2 points), the handling of PTO (average of 0 points), and voting for a candidate (-0.5 points).

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<sup>8</sup> Also see, Joan C. Williams, “One Sick Child Away from Being Fired: When ‘Opting Out’ Is Not an Option,” University of California Hastings College of the Law, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For similar results from New York City see “Sick in the City: What they Lack of Paid Leave Means for Working New Yorkers” The Community Service Society of New York, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> The signs in Table 24 are all scored so a + indicates more support for paid sick days and a – less support. In the case of anti-arguments, the minus means that more people found these statements very convincing in 2010 than in 2008.

It is likely that the recession and high level of unemployment have made people a bit more cautious about expanding labor standards. This is shown in the changes in the six anti-arguments asked in both 2008 and 2010. Support for the statement that “Given the economic downturn we are now in, businesses can’t afford to add new benefits like paid sick leave. This would just hurt businesses and increase unemployment,” rose by 8 points, well above the average of +3 points for the other five anti-arguments. In general, the recession slightly lowered people’s ratings of all workers’ rights. The slip in rating paid sick days as very important (from 77% to 69%) was similar to the decline of almost 6 points for all labor standards.

## Conclusion

Americans overwhelmingly view paid sick days as a basic labor standard. It is rated as more important than several workers’ rights already required by law. 75% consider it a basic worker’s right and 75% believe that employers should be required by law to provide paid sick days to workers. 86% endorse a plan that would require a minimum of seven paid sick days per year, and 70% back a plan requiring a minimum of nine days. Additionally, 71-77% favors plans to give part-time workers sick days proportional to their hours.

People are sensitive to the burdens that smaller employers might face in complying with paid-sick-days legislation. A plurality of 47% favors allowing those employing with less than 15 employees to provide “some, but fewer, paid sick days than larger employers” and 33% favors smaller employers providing the same number of paid sick days as larger employers. Only 17% wants smaller employers exempted from providing any paid sick days.

People are divided about whether employers with PTO plans should be excused from offering separate paid sick days.

Arguments in support of paid sick days are found to be much more convincing than arguments against this requirement. Of the seven arguments in favor of paid sick days (dealing with excessive compensation to CEOs, protecting public health, improving worker productivity, helping working families, workers not being in a position to lose a day’s wage due to illness in today’s economy, most other countries requiring paid sick days, and having all workers covered if company executives are) people on average found 3.5 statements to be very convincing. Of the seven arguments against paid sick days (employee abuse of sick days, small businesses being hurt by the requirement, employers making off-setting cutbacks in wages and/or other benefits, losing jobs to overseas competition, government mandates adding burdens to businesses, businesses not being able to handling the costs in the current weak economy, and government regulations hampering economic growth and interfering with free enterprise) people found 1.9 anti-statements very convincing.

Supporting paid sick days is a plus for political candidates. Both before and after hearing arguments for and against paid sick days, voters indicate they are more likely to vote for a candidate who backed this requirement. By a margin of 33 percentage points voters are more likely to support a candidate who favored paid sick days. In contrast, supporting an exemption for smaller employers is a negative for political candidates. The likelihood of voting for a candidate endorsing exempting smaller employers from providing any paid sick days falls by -18 percentage points.

After hearing the various intervening, survey questions and the seven pro- and seven anti-statements, support for paid sick days is essentially unchanged. Likewise, after hearing all

arguments people indicate that they are more likely to vote for a candidate for paid sick days (+18 points) and less likely to vote for a candidate opposing paid sick days (-23 points).

Across all socio-demographic and political groups majorities endorse paid sick days as a basic worker's right and support legislation requiring employers to provide paid sick days. Support is higher among women than men, low-income earners than those with high income, those with less education than college graduates, African Americans than other racial groups, unmarried parents than others, and Democrats than Republicans. Differences are generally either small or inconsistent for region, age, and labor-force status. But despite the group differences, majorities across virtually all groups back paid sick days.

About four out of every ten workers in the private sector receive no paid sick days and many of those with some coverage are either unable to use it to care for ill family members, qualify for only a small number of days, and/or receive PTO rather than separate paid sick days. The lack of paid sick days is a concern to those without coverage and associated with high dissatisfaction with one's job. About 23% of employees have lost a job or been told they would lose a job for taking time off due to personal or family illness.

A lack of paid sick days leads to more workers going to work with a contagious illness (by 18 percentage points). Likewise, those without paid sick days are more likely to send a sick child to school or daycare (by 10 percentage points). These facts help to explain why 80% found the argument about paid-sick-days legislation being needed to protect public health to be convincing and underscore the importance of public health regarding this issue.

The lack of paid sick days also drives up medical costs and overburdens medical facilities by leading more people to use hospital emergency rooms rather than seeing a doctor during working hours.

In sum, the lack of paid sick days has various negative impacts on both public health and the well-being individual workers and their families. Substantial majorities believe that paid sick days are an important workers' right and that employers should be required by law to provide their workers with paid sick days.

Table 1A  
Importance of Various Labor Standards

The government sets various standards to protect workers' rights. How important do you consider the following measures. Would you say they are very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant for workers?

	% Very Important
Workplace safety regulations	85
Family and maternity leave	78
Minimum wage	70
Paid sick days	69
Time and a half pay for overtime work	69
Maximum hour limits	46
Right to join an union	43

Table 1B  
Importance of Paid Sick Days as a Labor Standard by Socio-demographics

	% Very Important
New England	65
Mid-Atlantic	75
East North Central	57
West North Central	71
South Atlantic	70
East South Central	72
West South Central	77
Mountain	76
Pacific	68
Married	67
Not Married	75
Men	61
Women	78
18-29	66
30-39	69
40-49	65
50-64	79
65+	75
Whites	70
African Americans	87
Hispanics	67
Others	60
Strong Democrat	85
Not So Strong Democrat	73
Democratically Leaning Independent	83
Independent	61
Republican Leaning Independent	59
Not so Strong Republican	80
Strong Republican	64
Less than High School	84
High School Graduate	71
High School Graduate + Vocational	55
Some College	74
College Graduate	66
Post-College Graduate	68
Less than \$20,000	77
\$20,000-49,999	74
\$50,000-79,999	64
\$80,000+	71

Table 1B (continued)

% Very Important

Employed Full Time	68
Employed Part time	79
Retired	75
Keeping House	66
Married, Children under 18	67
Married, No Children	68
Not Married, Children under 18	81
Not Married, No Children	72

Table 2A

Paid Sick Days as Basic Worker's Right

Now I am going to read you a statement. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means that you agree very strongly and 0 means that you don't agree at all, please tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement.

Paid sick days is a basic worker right, just like being paid a decent wage.

	Basic Worker's Right
10	43%
9	8
8	13
7	7
6	4
5	6
1-4	19
Mean	7.3

Table 2B

Agreement about Paid Sick Days Being Basic Worker's Right

Basic Worker's Right (% 6-10)	
New England	81
Mid-Atlantic	82
East North Central	64
West North Central	78
South Atlantic	75
East South Central	84
West South Central	69
Mountain	81
Pacific	75
Married	73
Not Married	82
Men	65
Women	87
18-29	87
30-39	75
40-49	72
50-64	74
65+	79
Whites	74
African Americans	95
Hispanics	80
Others	68
Strong Democrat	93
Not So Strong Democrat	92
Democratic-Leaning Independent	91
Independent	70
Republican Leaning Independent	61
Not so Strong Republican	61
Strong Republican	64
Less than High School	87
High School Graduate	88
High School Grade + Vocational	73
Some College	77
College Graduate	68
Post-College Graduate	72
Less than \$20,000	90
\$20,000-49,999	84
\$50,000-79,999	75
\$80,000+	70

Table 2B (continued)

Basic Worker's Right (% 6-10)

Employed Full Time	70
Employed Part time	87
Retired	77
Keeping House	75
Married, Children under 18	74
Married, No Children	73
Not Married, Children under 18	93
Not Married, No Children	77

Table 3A  
Support for Paid Sick Days Law

Overall do you favor or oppose a law that would guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly or not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Law
Favor, Strongly	61%
Favor, Not Strongly	14
Oppose, Not Strongly	11
Oppose, Strongly	13
Don't Know	1

Table 3B  
Support for Paid Sick Days Law

	% for Law
New England	88
Mid-Atlantic	76
East North Central	60
West North Central	74
South Atlantic	80
East South Central	82
West South Central	75
Mountain	67
Pacific	75
Married	76
Not Married	77
Men	64
Women	88
18-29	73
30-39	73
40-49	81
50-64	78
65+	85
Whites	77
African Americans	90
Hispanics	75
Others	56
Strong Democrat	89
Not So Strong Democrat	92
Democratic Leaning Independent	92
Independent	77
Republican Leaning Independent	78
Not so Strong Republican	73
Strong Republican	59
Less than High School	71
High School Graduate	84
High School Graduate + Vocational	72
Some College	83
College Graduate	67
Post-College Graduate	77
Less than \$20,000	80
\$20,000 to 49,999	83
\$50,000-79,999	74
\$80,000+	73

Table 3B (continued)

	% for Law
Employed Full Time	70
Employed Part time	80
Retired	82
Keeping House	81
Married, Children under 18	78
Married, No Children	76
Not Married, Children under 18	85
Not Married, No Children	74

Table 4  
Support for Specific Paid Sick Days Proposals

Now I am going to ask you about some specific proposals about paid sick time. One law would guarantee all workers paid sick days to care for themselves or for immediate family members. Employees would earn one hour of sick time for every 30 hours they work, up to 72 hours or 9 days of paid sick time per year. Based on this description, would you favor or oppose this law to provide paid sick days to all workers.

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

Now I am going to ask you about some specific proposals about paid sick time. One law would guarantee all workers paid sick days to care for themselves or for immediate family members. Employees would earn one hour of sick time for every 35 hours they work, up to 56 hours or 7 days of paid sick time per year. Based on this description, would you favor or oppose this law to provide paid sick days to all workers.

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Up to 9 Sick Days Per Year	Up to 7 Sick Days Per Year
Favor, Strongly	59%	69%
Favor, Not Strongly	11	17
Oppose, Not Strongly	11	5
Oppose, Strongly	19	9

Table 5  
Support for Specific Proposals for Part-Time Workers

Now I am going to ask you about some specific proposals about paid sick time. One law would guarantee all workers paid sick time to care for themselves or for immediate family members. Full-time employees would receive 9 paid sick days per year and part-time employees would receive a proportional amount so that a half-time employee would 4.5 paid sick days per year. Would you favor or oppose this law to provide paid sick days to all workers?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

Now I am going to ask you about some specific proposals about paid sick time. One law would guarantee all workers paid sick time to care for themselves or for immediate family members. Full-time employees would receive 7 paid sick days per year and part-time employees would receive a proportional amount so that a half-time employee would receive 3.5 paid sick days per year. Would you favor or oppose this law to provide paid sick days to all workers?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Up to 9 Sick Days Per Year	Up to 7 Sick Days Per Year
Favor, Strongly	58%	67%
Favor, Not Strongly	13	10
Oppose, Not Strongly	15	9
Oppose, Strongly	15	15

Table 6  
Support for Paid Sick Days for Smaller Establishments

Another law would guarantee employees of organizations with more than 15 employees up to 9 paid sick days per year and require organizations with less 15 employees to give 6 paid sick days instead of 9. Would you favor or oppose this law to provide paid sick days to all workers?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Firms Under 15 Employees
Favor, Strongly	48%
Favor, Not Strongly	19
Oppose, Not Strongly	9
Oppose, Strongly	20
Don't Know	3

Table 7A

Support for Lower Paid Sick Days Requirements for Smaller Establishments

Another law would guarantee employees of organizations with more than 15 employees up to 7 paid sick days per year and require organizations with less than 15 employees to give 5 paid sick days instead of 7. Would you favor or oppose this law to provide paid sick days to all workers?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Firms Under 15 Employees
Favor, Strongly	53%
Favor, Not Strongly	19
Oppose, Not Strongly	10
Oppose, Strongly	18
Don't Know	--

Table 7B

Support for Lower Paid Sick Days Requirements for Smaller Establishments

If a law were passed to guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days, would you favor or oppose having small businesses of 15 or fewer employees provide five days instead of seven days of paid sick time that larger businesses may provide?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Firms Under 15 Employees
Favor, Strongly	37%
Favor, Not Strongly	26
Oppose, Not Strongly	13
Oppose, Strongly	22
Don't Know	3

Table 8  
Support for Excluding Smaller Employees from Paid-Sick-Days Requirements

If a law were passed to guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days, would you favor or oppose exempting small businesses of 15 or fewer employees to provide paid sick days?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Firms Under 15 Employees
Favor, Strongly	33%
Favor, Not Strongly	17
Oppose, Not Strongly	21
Oppose, Strongly	28
Don't Know	1

Table 9  
Support for Paid Sick Days for Smaller vs. Larger Establishments

If a law guaranteeing paid sick days was passed, should employers with less than 15 employees be required to...

	Firms Under 15 Employees
Provide the same number of paid sick days as larger employers	33%
Provide some, but fewer, paid sick days than larger employers	47
NOT have to provide any paid sick days	17
Don't know	4

Table 10

Impact on Support for Paid Sick Days if Smaller Establishments Excluded from Requirements

Would you be more or less likely to support the proposal for paid sick days if businesses with less 15 employees were exempted from providing paid sick days?

IF MORE/LESS, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly?

	Firms Under 15 Employees
More, Strongly	21%
More, Not Strongly	28
Less, Not Strongly	25
Less, Strongly	23
Don't Know	3

Table 11

Support for Treating PTO as Meeting Paid Sick Days Requirements

Some employers already give employees a pool of paid time off, also called PTO. PTO most often includes holiday, vacation, and sick time. If such a pool exists and covers at least nine days, employers would be exempt from the new law. Do you favor or oppose this exemption?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly/not so strongly favor/oppose?

Favor, Strongly	36%
Favor, Not Strongly	19
Oppose, Not Strongly	17
Oppose, Strongly	27
Don't Know	2

Some employers give employees a pool of paid time off, also called PTO. PTO combines together time off for vacation, illnesses, and other reasons for missing work. If PTO is offered and covers at least nine days, should employers still be required to provide separate paid sick days or should they be excused from providing paid sick days to their employees?

Still required to provide paid sick days	45%
Excused from providing paid sick days	52
Don't Know	3

Table 12A

Political Support for Candidate Supporting Paid Sick Days

If a candidate for elected office came out in support of *paid sick days* for all workers, would that make you more or less likely to vote for that candidate or wouldn't it make a difference?

IF MORE/LESS LIKELY, ASK: Is that much/somewhat?

Much more likely	28%
Somewhat more likely	19
Somewhat less likely	4
Much less likely	10
No difference	39
Don't Know	1

Table 12B

## Impact on Voting for a Candidate Who Supports Paid-Sick-Days Legislation

% More Likely to Vote for Candidate

New England	60
Mid-Atlantic	56
East North Central	27
West North Central	49
South Atlantic	45
East South Central	59
West South Central	51
Mountain	44
Pacific	51
Married	46
Not Married	53
Men	39
Women	59
18-29	54
30-39	50
40-49	42
50-64	55
65+	41
Whites	58
African Americans	58
Hispanics	50
Others	49
Strong Democrat	71
Not So Strong Democrat	65
Democratic Leaning Independent	57
Independent	40
Republican Leaning Independent	28
Not so Strong Republican	40
Strong Republican	36
Less than High School	55
High School Graduate	56
High School Graduate + Vocational	47
Some College	42
College Graduate	48
Post-College Graduate	49
Less than \$20,000	69
\$20,000-49,999	55
\$50,000-79,999	47
\$80,000+	41

Table 12B (continued)

% More Likely to Vote for Candidate

Employed Full Time	45
Employed Part time	60
Retired	45
Keeping House	51
Married, Children under 18	47
Married, No Children	46
Not Married, Children under 18	57
Not Married, No Children	51

Table 13

Political Support for Candidate Supporting Excluding Smaller Employers from  
Paid Sick Days Requirement

If a candidate for elected office came out in support of exempting employers with less than 15 employees from having to provide paid sick days, would that make you more or less likely to vote for that candidate or wouldn't it make a difference?

IF MORE/LESS LIKELY, ASK: Is that much/somewhat?

Firms Under 15  
Employees

Much more likely	8%
Somewhat more likely	10
Somewhat less likely	14
Much less likely	22
No difference	45
Don't Know	1

Table 14

How Convincing Are Arguments in Favor of Paid Sick Days

Now I am going to read you some statements people have given in support of paid sick days for all workers and I want you to tell me how convincing a message it is to make you SUPPORT paid sick days for all workers - very convincing, somewhat convincing, a little convincing, or not convincing at all.

A. Companies give their CEO's huge salaries and stock bonuses. They could cut back on such wasteful expenses and provide paid sick days to their employees.

B. Paid sick days are particularly important for workers in the restaurant, child care, and health care industries. Most food service workers get no sick days and they show up in the restaurants coughing, sneezing and feverish as they prepare and serve meals. This puts all of us at risk. We will all be healthier when all workers get paid sick days.

C. Requiring paid sick days doesn't hurt employers' bottom line. Sick employees who show up at work are less productive and they remain sick and less productive longer when they work while sick. Also, they infect other workers and this further reduces productivity and hurts profits.

D. In America, you shouldn't have to risk your job to take care of your family, and you shouldn't have to put your family at risk just to do your job. Unfortunately, many workers face these choices every day. We are in the 21st century, but our workplaces are operating under 19th century terms. Our nation needs new labor standards to accommodate the needs of today's working families. If we believe in family values, it's time to value families.

E. Over 135 countries already guarantee paid sick days for workers. Having American workers receive this will not put their employers at a competitive disadvantage.

F. Given the high cost of gas, food, and other goods, workers can't afford to lose their wages when they are ill or have to care for a sick child or family member. They need to have guaranteed paid sick days.

G. If executives in a company get paid sick days, then all employees should also get sick leave.

	Very Convincing	Somewhat Convincing	A Little Convincing	Not Convincing at All	Don't Know
A. CEO Extravagance	46%	25	9	18	2
B. Public Health	55%	25	9	11	1
C. Worker Productivity	54%	26	9	12	--
D. Working Families	54%	22	8	15	1
E. Global Standards	31%	33	9	25	2
F. Pay Needed	52%	24	10	13	1
G. Cover All Employees	63%	18	5	13	1

Table 15

How Convincing Are Arguments Against Paid Sick Days

Now I am going to read you some statements people have given in *opposition* to paid sick days for all workers and I want you to tell me how convincing a message it is to make you oppose paid sick days for all workers - very convincing, somewhat convincing, a little convincing, or not convincing at all.

A. Legislating paid sick days opens up the door to abuse by employees. Some employees will use paid sick days as vacation days but without giving advance notice, leaving employers scrambling to find replacements for absent workers, which is not possible for some small businesses. Abuse of paid sick days translates into lost dollars for businesses and higher costs for consumers.

B. Given the amount of economic competition in the world today, American employers shouldn't be burdened with new government mandates. Requiring paid sick days will just accelerate the loss of jobs overseas.

C. If employers are forced to increase costs by providing for paid sick days, they will cut other costs by reducing wages or benefits like health care coverage.

D. A one-size-fits all, paid sick leave mandate from the government would threaten workers' wages and benefits. Government mandated benefits that increase business costs would have to be made up by cuts in wages or benefits.

E. Forcing all employers to provide paid sick leave is unfair to small businesses. Many simply won't be able to bear the added costs and more small businesses will be driven out of business and replaced by large, national corporations and chain stores.

F. Given the economic downturn we are now in, businesses can't afford to add new benefits like paid sick leave. This would just hurt businesses and increase unemployment.

	Very Convincing	Somewhat Convincing	A Little Convincing	Not Convincing at All	Don't Know
A. Employee Abuse	35%	27	15	22	1
B. Overseas Job Loss	21%	23	17	37	2
C. Other Cutbacks	22%	26	21	28	2
D. Government Mandate	21%	30	17	31	1
E. Small Business	32%	27	16	23	1
F. Economic Downturn	26%	25	16	32	2
G. Government Regulations	30%	21	15	31	3

Table 16

Support for Paid Sick Days after Hearing Arguments For and Against

Now that you have heard these arguments for and against paid sick days ... do you favor or oppose a law that would guarantee all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members?

IF FAVOR/OPPOSE, ASK: Is that strongly or not so strongly favor/oppose?

	Law
Favor, Strongly	59%
Favor, Not Strongly	15
Oppose, Not Strongly	10
Oppose, Strongly	15
Don't Know	1

Table 17

Political Support for Candidates after Hearing Arguments For/Against Paid Sick Days

And now that you have heard these arguments for and against paid sick days, if a candidate for elected office came out in support of *paid sick days* for all workers, would that make you more or less likely to vote for that candidate or wouldn't it make a difference?

IF MORE/LESS LIKELY, ASK: Is that much/somewhat?

And now that you have heard these arguments for and against paid sick days, if a candidate for elected office came out in opposition to *paid sick days* for all workers, would that make you more or less likely to vote for that candidate or wouldn't it make a difference?

IF MORE/LESS LIKELY, ASK: Is that much/somewhat?

	Candidate for Paid Sick Days	Candidates against Paid Sick Days
Much more likely	22%	9%
Somewhat more likely	20	11
Somewhat less likely	9	15
Much less likely	15	28
No Difference	33	36
Don't Know	2	--

Table 18  
Employee Eligibility for Benefits

I am going to read you a list of fringe benefits that workers sometimes get in addition to their wages. Whether you receive it or not, please tell me whether you are *ELIGIBLE* to receive each fringe benefit.)

	% Eligible
Medical or health insurance	81
Dental care benefits	72
Life insurance	68
A pension or retirement plan	67
Flexible hours or flextime scheduling	65
Sick leave with full pay	64
Maternity or paternity leave with full re-employment rights	61

Table 19

## % Eligible for Paid Sick Days by Workers' Socio-Demographics

Part-time employee	24
Full-time employee	73
Men	71
Women	57
18-29	56
30-39	74
40-49	65
50-64	64
65+	50
Income less than \$20,000	30
\$20,000-49,999	45
\$50,000-79,999	68
\$80,000+	82
Less than high school	11
High school graduate	56
High school + vocational	73
Some college	59
College graduate	73
Post graduate degree	76
White	63
Black	80
Hispanic	51
Other	86
Married	71
Not married	52
Married, Children under 18	77
Married, No Children	64
Not married, Children under 18	62
Not married, No Children	48

Table 20

Consequences of Taking off Time for Personal and/or Family Illnesses

Have you or any other adult worker in your family ever been fired, suspended, written up or otherwise penalized by an employer for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family member, or to cope with an illness yourself?

Have you ever lost a job for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family members, or to cope with an illness yourself?

Have you ever been told by an employer that you would be fired, suspended, written up or otherwise penalized by an employer for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family member, or to cope with an illness yourself?

Have you ever been told by an employer that you would lose your job if you took time off from work to care for a sick child or family members, or to cope with an illness yourself?

	% Experiencing
You or Family Member Fired, Suspended, or Other Punishment	12
Lost Job	16
Told You Would be Fired, Suspended, or Other Punishment	11
Told You Would Lose Job	14

Table 21

Concern over and Satisfaction relating to Lack of Paid Sick Days

How concerned are you about not having paid sick days?

Are you very concerned, fairly concerned, a little concerned, or not at all concerned?

Very concerned	31%
Fairly concerned	24
A little concerned	26
Not at all concerned	19

Several factors contribute to people's satisfaction with their jobs. Please tell me whether you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of your job...

Your sick leave time

	Eligible for Paid Sick Days	Not Eligible for Paid Sick Days
Very satisfied	65%	19%
Somewhat satisfied	29	27
Somewhat dissatisfied	4	19
Very dissatisfied	1	25
Don't Know	--	11

Table 22

Working When Sick by Eligibility for Paid Sick Days

Have you ever had to go to work when you were sick with a contagious illness like the flu or a viral infection?

	% Yes
Eligible for paid sick days	37
Not eligible for paid sick days	55

Table 23  
 Handling Illnesses by Eligibility for Paid Sick Days  
 (% Reporting Behavior)

Have you ever gone to a hospital emergency room yourself because you were unable to take off from work to get medical care during your normal job hours?

Have you ever taken your child or another family member to a hospital emergency room because you were unable to take off from work to get medical care during your normal job hours?

Sometimes people end up sending a sick child to school or daycare because they have to go to work. Have you ever had to send a sick child to school or daycare because you could not take off from work?

	Emergency Room, Self	Emergency Room, Family	Send Sick Child	One or More of These
Eligible for paid sick days	10%	7%	14%	21%
Not eligible for paid sick days	20%	18%	24%	42%

Table 24  
Trends in Attitudes towards Paid Sick Days

	2008	2010	Change (2010 – 2008)
Paid Sick Days (PSD)...			
As Labor Standard=Very Imp.	77	69	- 8
A Basic Worker's Right=10	50	43	- 7
For Law Guaranteeing (Before Arguments)	86	75	-11
For Law Guaranteeing (After Arguments)	81	74	- 7
For up to 7 days	85	86	+ 1
For up to 9 days	79	70	- 9
For Part-time if Full-time 7 days	82	77	- 5
For Part-time if Full-time 9 days	82	71	-11
For 9 vs. 5 days for Large/Small Employer	70	67	- 3
For 7 vs. 5 days for Large/Small Employer	72	72	0
Against Exempting Small Employers	48	49	+ 1
For Same Treatment of Small/Large Employers	35	33	- 2
Less Support if Smaller Employers Exempted	51	49	- 2
Against Counting PTO as Sick Days	42	44	+ 2
Against PTO for Paid Sick Day Requirement	47	45	- 2
More Likely to Support Pro-PSD Candidate	46	47	+ 1
Less for Candidate Exempting Smaller Employers	47	45	- 2
Average 6 pro-PSD Arguments=Very Convincing	53.5	49.7	- 4.8
Average 6 anti-PSD Arguments=Very Convincing	22.3	26.3	- 3.9

## Appendix 1: Survey Methodology

The 2010 National Paid Sick Days Study (NPSDS) was designed and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago with support from the Public Welfare Foundation. The NPSDS is a telephone sample of adults living in households in the United States. Interviews were completed in English and Spanish. The field dates were March 18, 2010 to May 6, 2010. A total of 1,461 cases were collected.

### Sample

Two separate samples were used:

The first sample was a national RDD sample purchased from Marketing Systems Group ([http://www.m-s-g.com/genesys/genesys\\_products/rddsamples.htm](http://www.m-s-g.com/genesys/genesys_products/rddsamples.htm)) and contained 25,000 records. Phone numbers in this sample were address matched using TARGUS. An address match was found for approximately 6,400 cases.

The second sample was a national cell phone RDD sample purchased from Marketing Systems Group which contained 5,000 records. This allowed the inclusion of households not represented in the landline RDD sample.

Cases in the RDD and Cell phone samples were combined and divided into 100 replicates, each containing 300 cases.

### Data collection

Addresses were obtained for 6,366 cases in the sample. Advance letters were sent to cases in the national RDD landline sample. Cases in replicate release group 1 (N=2,088) were mailed an advance letter 2 days prior to the start of data collection. Cases in replicate release group 2 (N=2,144) were mailed an advance letter on 3/19/2010. Cases in replicate release group 3 (N=2,134) were mailed an advance letter on 3/23/2010.

Interviewer trainings were held on 3/17/2010 and 3/18/2010. The interviewers who attended the first training began making the first phone calls on 3/18/2010. All cases in replicate release group 1 and 2 were released for dialing at the start of data collection. The RDD cases in replicate release group 3 were released for dialing on 3/25/2010. The RDD cases in replicate release group 4 were released on 4/12/2010. The cell phone cases in replicates 52 to 61 were released for dialing on 4/27/2010.

During the course of data collection, a toll-free line was monitored so that calls from respondents could be logged and shared with interviewers or supervisors as needed. Data collection continued through 5/06/2010.

Response rate 4 according to Standard Definitions of the American Association for Public Opinion Research was 34%.

### Weighting

## Survey Methodology (continued)

The initial weights were calculated as an inverse of the selection probability of the sample. The initial weights were adjusted for non-response. The nonresponse adjusted weights were further adjusted for the within-household selection probability for an eligible individual. Then, the final weights were adjusted by post-stratification. The adjustment cells for post-stratification were constructed by cross-classifying region, sex, race/ethnicity, age group, cell phone status. The control totals for the post-stratification adjustment were estimated from the March Current Population Survey (CPS) 2009 and the National Health Interview Surveys 2009. The final weights were normalized so that their sum is equal to the number of complete-case respondents.

### **Questions**

Random sub-samples were administered different versions of parallel questions to assess the impact of different terms. The alternative wordings are all indicated in the tables.