



February 26, 2010

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations dedicated to issues critical to working women, we are writing to thank you for your ongoing efforts to improve federal contracting and to urge you to support high-road contracting reforms that promote good jobs and ensure federal contractors are rewarded for having policies that support their workers. Based on our experience and research, we know such contracting reforms would significantly help families, especially lower income families. Specifically, we believe that contracting reform should include a provision that rewards federal contractors who meet the paid sick leave standard that the federal government provides for its workers by providing a preference to those contractors in the competition for awarding contracts.

Federal contracting is a large and lucrative industry. Unfortunately, the federal government too often contracts with companies that pay very low wages, treat their workers poorly, and violate labor laws. Estimates indicate that one in five workers on a federal contract do not earn enough to keep a family of four out of poverty. Although we do not know for certain how many federal contractor employees have paid sick days, we do know that, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, approximately 40% of the private workforce, or 2 in 5 workers, do not have access to paid sick days. Among low income workers, only 33% have access to paid sick time versus 81% among higher income workers.

Job-protected paid sick time is crucial to the ability of low income workers to maintain their economic security. A recent survey showed that 1 in 6 workers reported that they or a family member has been fired, suspended, punished, or threatened with being fired for taking time off because of an illness, or to care for a sick child or other relative.<sup>1</sup>

Job-protected paid sick time is also critical to the protection of public health. Workers who are ill need to be able to stay home to recover. This month, a study that examined the spread of H1N1 found that workers attending work while ill led to the spread of that virus to as many as seven million of their co-workers.<sup>2</sup> Public health officials in Boston stated that part of the reason

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<sup>1</sup> <http://publicwelfare.org/AboutUs/documents/PolINRFINALa.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Drago and Kevin Miller "Sick at Work: Infected Employees at Work During the H1N1 Pandemic September –November, 2009," (February 2010) (available at <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B284sickatwork.pdf>).

that poorer children and children of color were more likely to contract the H1N1 virus was that their parents did not have access to paid sick time and thus could not keep their infectious children out of school.<sup>3</sup>

Paid sick time that can be used, as it can by federal workers, to care for an ill family member is especially critical to women. A woman is regularly the adult in the family who must care for sick children or other sick family members; thus, policies that do not allow for sick time to be used for an ill family member will force women workers, more than men, into the impossible situation of choosing between their families' economic security and the need to care for an ill loved one. This difficult decision confronts working families regularly: most workers are in families where both adults work or in single-headed households.

Rewarding and encouraging job-protected paid sick days is not only good for workers and for the public health, it is a good business investment and promotes economical and efficient federal contracting. Studies have consistently shown that paid sick leave increases employee productivity which, in turn, increases employer profits.<sup>4</sup>

The federal government is a leader in providing paid sick days to its workers and allowing those workers to use that time to care for themselves or an ill family member. Federal contractors who meet the federal government standard of paid sick time should be rewarded in the contracting process for their high-road policies.

The federal government has long taken a moral stand that contracting should not be merely a way to acquire goods and services cheaply but rather should provide a model for the private sector. For example, Executive Order 11246, signed by President Johnson in 1965, which requires that all individuals working for federal contractors have an equal opportunity for employment, has been key to increasing opportunities for women and minorities.

Thus, we encourage you to pursue high-road contracting reforms that ensure that the federal government does business only with responsible companies that support their workers' attempts to meet their work and family responsibilities. We urge you to support reforms that will ensure that in selecting contractors, significant weight is given to choosing companies that provide workers with paid sick days that can be used for the worker's own illness or to care for a family member who is ill.

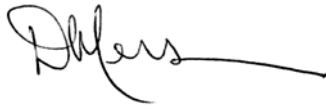
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<sup>3</sup> Richard Knox, "Officials Find Swine Flu Hits Minorities Harder," (August 19, 2009) (available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112035625>)

<sup>4</sup> Vicky Lovell, "Valuing Good Health: An Estimate of Costs and Savings for the Healthy Families Act," Institute of Women's Policy Research, 2005, (available at: <http://www.iwpr.org/Publications/pdf.htm>); Christine Siegwarth Meyer, Swati Mukerjee, and Ann Sestero, "Work-Family Benefits: Which Ones Maximize Profits?" *Journal of Managerial Issues*, April 1, 2001, (available at <http://www.allbusiness.com/humanresources/employee-benefits/970420-1.html>).

Your action to further transform federal contracting would have a direct and positive impact on the lives of America's working families and provide much needed incentives and oversight for a vital sector of our economy.

Sincerely,



Debra L. Ness  
President  
National Partnership for Women & Families



Judith L. Lichtman  
Senior Advisor  
National Partnership for Women & Families

A Better Balance: The Work and Family Legal Center  
American Association of University Women (AAUW)  
Business and Professional Women Foundation  
Center for Law and Social Policy  
Family Values @ Work  
Feminist Majority  
Labor Project for Working Families  
MomsRising.org  
Trust for America's Health  
Wider Opportunities for Women  
Women Employed