

**REMARKS OF THE HON. ROSA L. DELAURO
PAID SICK DAYS – SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE PROTECTIONS
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Good morning. Chairman Woolsey, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections today. I appreciate your leadership on this issue and thank you for holding this important hearing on work and family.

As you know, it is a battle everyday to put working families center stage. In recent years, the shape and role of America's working and middle class families have changed. So have their economic prospects. In 1975, less than half of mothers of school-age children worked outside the home, now it is nearly 70 percent. Today, one in four households are caring for an elderly relative and that number is expected to rise.

These days, with the rising cost of living and the need to balance work and family, parents are stretched thin, struggling to make sure their children get the attention and care they deserve.

There is no simple answer when it comes to strengthening our working and middle class families. But there are a number of critical steps we can take -- initiatives which have proven successful at making opportunity real for families and children.

And that is why legislation like the Healthy Families Act is so important. Paid sick days are a basic right for people in the workplace. More than half of the workforce already has the right to take time off when they are sick, or when they need to stay home to care for a sick child or elderly relative.

But the truth is that 57 million people in our workforce do not have that right -- something I think most Americans would find shocking. I think most Americans believe that being a working

parent should not mean having to choose between your job, taking care of yourself, and taking care of your family -- that paid sick leave is a matter of common sense -- of values.

Yet unlike 145 other nations, the United States does not guarantee a single paid sick day to workers -- not one day. We do have the federal Family & Medical Leave Act, which provides leave for serious illnesses. But that is unpaid and only covers about 60 percent of the workforce.

As a result, nearly half of private sector workers, including more than three-quarters of low-income workers, have no paid leave of any kind -- no paid sick days, no paid vacation, and no paid personal days. Nothing.

The Healthy Families Act, which I introduced with Senator Kennedy, would correct this injustice, requiring employers with 15 or more workers to provide 7 days of paid sick leave annually for

their own medical needs or to care for of a family member. This is really about simply setting the floor on what we all can agree is good corporate citizenship.

Ensuring that employees are productive and healthy helps businesses too. As many businesses already know and as the Journal of Managerial Issues found, offering workers the option of taking time off to care for a sick family member has a positive effect on morale – and profits.

Last month, here at our National Summit on America's Children, Jody Heymann, with the Project on Global Working Families, spoke about paid sick days' integral role in maintaining America's competitive edge in a global economy. She reported that all of the 20 most competitive countries, with the exception of the United States, guarantee paid sick days. In fact, 18 of them provide 31 or more days.

When working parents must go to work sick, they risk infecting their entire workplace, then we all pay the price for denying employees paid sick days -- especially if they work in health care, child care, or food service. Indeed, well below every other major industry, only 15 percent of workers in food service have paid sick days -- endangering hundreds even thousands of patrons.

Working women and their families, in particular, would benefit from our bill. We all know that the brunt of the responsibility for caring for children still falls upon women -- that is the way it is. Half of all working mothers report that they must miss work when a child is sick -- and half of them do not get paid. When nearly a third of all working mothers fear their job evaluation might suffer from missing work, imagine what this legislation could mean to them: peace of mind.

Of course, while paid sick days will make a tremendous difference, it is no silver bullet. We must embrace a *comprehensive* pro-family agenda. Chairman Woolsey, your legislation “The Balancing Act” shows us the right path forward -- paid leave for parents to care for newborns and attend school events, quality and accessible child care, in-school nutrition, after-school assistance, expanded funds for voluntary universal preschool.

Today, families’ fortunes are increasingly tied to an ever more volatile economy. Yet with a weak safety net stretched thin, those who bear the brunt have a very difficult time bouncing back. We have a responsibility to confront the unique challenges that INCOME INSECURITY places on working and middle class families. And there is no limit to what we can do to improve the odds for their success.

Whether it is raising the minimum wage, expanding the EITC, or supporting child care, pay equity and, yes, paid sick days

-- I believe our decisions and actions must reflect a broader worldview that begins with equal opportunity and giving people who strive to better themselves the tools to succeed. It is about honoring the work and responsibility that is the basis of our shared community.

Thank you again, Chairman Woolsey, for the opportunity to testify this morning.