

Public Welfare

FOUNDATION

**Embargoed for release until
10 A.M. EDT, Friday August 29, 2008**

Contact:
Diane Camper
202.965.1800 ext. 242 (office)
410.446.3246 (cell)
Lisa Lederer
202.421.5825 (cell)

American Workers Overwhelmingly Support Paid Sick Days, Labor Day Survey Finds

One in Six Workers Say They or a Family Member Have Been Fired, Suspended, Punished or Threatened by an Employer Due to Illness

WASHINGTON, DC – More than three-quarters of workers polled in a national survey released today view paid sick days as a basic right of employment that should be guaranteed by the government. The survey was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago and funded by the Public Welfare Foundation in Washington, DC.

Having paid sick days was seen as “very important” by 77 percent of those surveyed and 86 percent think that employers should be required by law to provide them. Respondents ranked paid sick days on a par with a minimum wage, overtime pay and family and medical leave – and considered it more important than maximum hour limits and the right to join a union. At least 80 percent rated paid sick days highly as a basic worker’s right and a basic workplace standard.

The strong support for paid sick days crosses all political and demographic lines and includes approval of pro-rated paid sick leave for part-time workers. The new survey also finds that workers without paid sick days are significantly more likely than those with paid sick days to report to work when they are contagious.

The survey also found that people are substantially more likely to vote for a candidate who supports paid sick days for all workers. Forty-six percent of those surveyed say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports paid sick days, while only 10 percent would be less likely to do so.

- more -

“Supporting paid sick days is a plus for political candidates,” concluded Dr. Tom W. Smith, a Senior Fellow at the National Opinion Research Center and director of the survey. “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.”

More than 40 percent of private sector workers – and 75 percent of low-wage workers -- lack paid sick days. San Francisco and Washington, DC are the only jurisdictions with paid sick day laws in place, although a dozen states considered legislation this year and the issue will be on the ballot in Milwaukee and Ohio in November. It is expected to be taken up in more states next year, and at the federal level Congress is considering the Healthy Families Act, which would provide seven paid sick days annually to workers in businesses with 15 or more employees.

Other survey findings demonstrate why paid sick days are important. According to the survey:

- One of six workers reported that he/she or a family member had been fired, suspended, punished or threatened with being fired for taking time off due to personal illness or to care for a sick child or other relative.
- 68 percent of workers without paid sick days reported going to work with the flu or some other contagious illness, compared to 53 percent of workers who received paid sick days.
- Survey respondents rated concern about sick employees spreading diseases at work as the most convincing argument for paid sick days legislation.

“The lack of paid sick days has real consequences for Americans forced to choose between losing a day’s pay or going to work sick,” said Deborah Leff, president of the Public Welfare Foundation. “It’s difficult for employees to be productive when they are not well. They also expose co-workers and customers to illness. Providing paid sick days – which this survey shows is favored by the vast majority of Americans -- is a simple matter of good employer practice and good public health.”

“Across all socio-demographic groups, majorities endorse paid sick days as a fundamental workplace necessity that employers should be required to provide. The lack of paid sick days is a concern to those lacking coverage and is associated with dissatisfaction with one’s job,” survey director Tom W. Smith added. Support runs strongest among women, African-Americans, Hispanics and lower-income workers.

At least 70 percent of respondents favor requiring both small and large businesses to provide paid sick days and more than 80 percent also agree that part-time workers should receive sick days proportional to their working hours.

- 30 -

Copies of the full survey report can be found at www.norc.uchicago.edu and at www.publicwelfare.org.

The Public Welfare Foundation is a national foundation with assets of more than \$500 million that supports efforts to ensure fundamental rights and opportunities for people in need. Its primary areas of focus are Workers' Rights, Health Reform, and Criminal and Juvenile Justice. For more information, please visit www.publicwelfare.org.