Over 1.4 million Massachusetts workers have inadequate sick leave, which neither allows them to sufficiently take care of themselves, nor allows them to take care of their families. Half of these workers have no sick time at all. As a result, workers spend more time sick, businesses lose productivity, and the public health of Massachusetts suffers. An Act for Establishing Earned Paid Sick Time solves this issue by allowing workers to earn time off with which to recover from illness and by ensuring this time can also be used to care for family members in need.

■ The Bill


■ Excerpt from Storybook

Sara Ferreira is an immigrant from South Africa. She moved to the United States when she was young for the increased security it would provide. With her, she brought the conviction that you need to stand up for things that you need. Here in Massachusetts, she was shocked when she “couldn’t take a day off” without losing pay. And she says if she did, “I would worry about my boss” and how he would react the next day. She was afraid of being reprimanded or losing her job for taking care of her health.

Sara says she advocates for the Paid Sick Leave Bill because “I don’t want another family to feel the way I feel.” The issue is one of human needs: paid sick days are a basic thing the workers of Massachusetts need.

■ Elevator Speech

Job security is a value at the heart of our society, especially during these hard economic times. Everyone benefits from a healthy economy, but a healthy economy requires healthy workers. Unfortunately, 40% of Massachusetts private sector workers lack a single guaranteed sick day. Without sick days, employees cannot keep themselves healthy, and infect their coworkers, resulting in 33,000 unnecessary cases of flu costing workers and their families

Justine Zayhowski '13 and David Kratzer '13
$16 million annually in lost wages and medical expenses. This also costs Massachusetts businesses $348 million in lost productivity and worker turnover. An Act Establishing Earned Paid Sick Time, H.3995, allows workers to earn time with which they can take care of themselves and their families. Will you ask House Speaker DeLeo to bring bill H.3995 to a vote on the House floor? Passing this bill supports healthy workers, and healthy workers build a healthy economy.

■ Op-ed

Do you want a bug with those fries? This is the question lawmakers should be asking themselves as they consider bill H.3995, An Act Establishing Earned Paid Sick Time, which allows workers to earn paid days off with which to take care of themselves and their families. The logic behind H.3995 is simple: if you go to work sick, you won’t be productive and will jeopardize the health of everyone with whom you come into contact—from coworkers to customers to bosses. Sick time allows people to stay home, get better, and avoid infecting their entire workplace.

This is an issue that affects all of us. Nobody wants to go to a restaurant and see a waiter coughing as they serve dinner, or arrive at work to find their coworker sneezing all over. It is difficult to prevent the spread of illness once it has entered the workplace: we get each other sick and then take it home to our families. How many times has somebody at the office given you a cold? And how productive have you been at your job with the flu? One cannot expect a workplace to be running at peak efficiency if the employees keep getting one another sick.

While this may not sound like a serious problem, the data might surprise you. Earned sick time is anticipated to prevent over 33,000 cases of flu from being spread within the workplace, per year. That amounts to a total annual savings of over $16 million for workers and their families due to fewer hospital visits and fewer missed days of work. Additionally, according to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, earned sick time—by preventing workers from getting their coworkers and customers sick—will save employers $348 million per year. These are the savings we can achieve by giving people the opportunity to stay home and care for themselves when they are sick. Some lawmakers are afraid that providing earned sick time for workers will make Massachusetts unappealing for businesses; employers will move out of Massachusetts. As a native of Connecticut, a state that passed similar legislation, I can assure you that this fear is unfounded. Businesses in Connecticut are healthier than ever. A recent report calculates the total burden to Connecticut businesses as merely 0.05% of total sales—compared to all of the savings outlined above. San Francisco also passed similar legislation in 2006. What happened? The Institute for Women’s Policy Research reports that six out of seven San Francisco employers saw no decrease in profitability as a result of providing paid sick time.

Massachusetts’ earned sick time bill is now on the House floor. If healthy workers and businesses are important to you, then call your representative and let them know that earned sick time is something you support. Every call is important. You can also visit www.masspaidleave.org to join the Massachusetts Paid Leave Coalition and learn more about this important issue. Nobody wants a bug with their fries.

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Justine

Overall, the most important thing I have learned about advocacy is the importance of coalitions and making connections with the right people. In all of the meetings I went to, the strength of communication between coalition members, and with the public, led to either the success or weakness in an event. Personal connections and coalition connections are often the ones that make the difference in attendance to rallies, talking to legislators, and making your bill move in the state house.

I think another important lesson is in timing. The MA Paid Leave Coalition spent a lot of time to figure out when their bill would be moving out of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, so that they could appropriately time their rally day to re-invigorate support for the bill during next steps.

I had a great experience working with the MA Paid Leave Coalition this semester, and am happy that they are planning to put our video (once we can figure out how to shrink the file and send it) on their Facebook page. It is great that we have actually done something hopefully beneficial for the coalition that has let us learn about advocacy from them.

David

The first meeting I attended, with Justine, was a Paid Sick Leave regularly-scheduled coalition meeting at the Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) office in Boston. The people present included Elizabeth Toulan of GBLS, Mass Paid
Leave Coalition campaign assistant Anne Sheldon, Patrick Williams [aide to Senator Jehlen], an aide for Representative Kahn, and roughly ten other coalition heads. The main points of the meeting were outreach to businesses, continued grassroots campaigning, the March kick-off event, and a legislative update.

I was immediately impressed by how developed the coalition is; there were a number of people present—from legislative aides, to union representatives, to advocacy leaders—and the meeting was incredibly efficient; if I had not known better, I would have thought I was in a corporate office.

This meeting was a great example of how multi-faceted advocacy can be. While I initially thought the focus would be on grassroots advertising or directly lobbying legislators, the true political maneuvering was far more nuanced; all of the coalition actions were highly targeted and coordinated. As an example, the coalition had a detailed [and top secret] list of how the individual legislators on the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development felt about paid sick leave. Based on this list, the coalition focused its grassroots efforts in the districts of the undecided legislators. The business outreach was equally targeted as a direct response to undecided legislators’ concerns. This reinforced the lesson that advocacy is not merely about being the loudest voice but, rather, being the voice which speaks to the right person at the right time with the correct message.

Video can be seen at: http://youtu.be/vDq9ueRepC8

Update
As of June 21, 2012 the Senate concurred on the bill. The House date was extended and will be voted upon at a later date.

For more information
http://www.masspaidleave.org/