

Advocacy groups encourage paid sick leave for all workers in Illinois

If Illinois were to join 35 other U.S. states, cities, and counties in guaranteeing at least a week of paid sick leave to all workers, the state would improve its ability to contain the spread of infectious disease, create more jobs, and raise incomes for more than 1.5 million Illinois workers by an average of \$1,040 per year, according to new research from the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois Economic Policy Institute.

“COVID-19 reminds us that when workers are forced to choose between a paycheck and their health, it makes it harder for communities and states to contain infectious disease,” said ILEPI Policy Director and study co-author Frank Manzo IV. “Yet while prior research has already detailed that paid sick leave laws reduce the spread of disease during an epidemic by 39%, our research shows that, if enacted in Illinois, it would improve economic activity and would boost income for Illinois workers by \$1.5 billion each year.”

The City of Chicago enacted a paid sick leave ordinance that extended these benefits to more than 385,000 workers in 2017. However, the report estimates that there are nearly 1.5 million other workers across Illinois— primarily downstate and in the Chicago suburbs— who currently lack access to compensated sick time. This includes workers across all economic sectors, as well as independent contractors and “gig” economy workers. And while prior research has documented how workers of all races and genders benefit from paid sick leave laws, the data shows that white workers and male workers currently have the lowest rates of access to these benefits in Illinois.

Using industry-standard IMPLAN economic analysis, researchers projected the impacts on both employers and the

Geographic Location	Share of Workers with Access to Paid Sick Leave	Share of Workers without Access to Paid Sick Leave	Estimated Workers without Access to Paid Sick Leave
State of Illinois	76.3%	23.7%	1,470,300
City of Chicago	93.1%	6.9%	128,200
Chicago Suburbs	69.7%	30.3%	761,700
Downstate	68.1%	31.9%	580,500

Demographic Group	State of Illinois	Access (Illinois)	No Access (Illinois)	City of Chicago	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate Illinois
All workers	1,470,300	76.3%	23.7%	128,200	761,700	580,500
Men	814,600	75.0%	25.0%	74,600	431,100	329,500
Women	655,800	77.6%	22.4%	53,600	330,500	251,100
White	1,185,700	69.5%	30.5%	59,900	469,900	350,300
African American	135,900	81.0%	19.0%	22,200	60,700	68,600
Latinx	103,600	90.9%	9.1%	33,900	178,900	126,000

Source(s): Authors’ estimates from weighting March 2019 data from the Employee Benefits Survey by the industry composition, union membership rate, and full-time share of workers in Illinois and 2019 data from the Current Population Survey Outaoina Rotation Groups (CPS-

economy if Illinois adopted the paid sick leave standards that currently apply in other jurisdictions. Specifically, they used the three-employee minimum that currently applies to the state’s minimum wage law, the 1 hour of leave for 30 hours worked that applies to paid sick leave laws in six states, and the minimum sick leave cap of 40 hours (or one week) that applies in eleven states to estimate the annual cost to employers of \$1.5 billion. This works out to a boost of more than \$1,000 per year to the annual earnings of the 1.5 million Illinois workers who currently lack such benefits, at a cost of just \$0.12 per hour worked.

“The data shows a paid sick leave law would improve workforce productivity, increase consumer spending by workers, and deliver substantial public health benefits— all without hindering job growth,” added study co-author, PMCR Director, and UIUC Professor Dr. Robert Bruno. “This

conclusion is also supported by the recent experience of Chicago, where job growth has far exceeded the rest of Illinois in the 30 months since the city enacted its paid sick leave ordinance.”

As Illinois works to address the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic that is costing the state’s workforce as much as \$1.5 billion in income every week and is expected to cost the state 207,000 jobs by summer, researchers noted that elected officials may need to consider a range of options to stem the short-term effects of the crisis and reduce longer-term risks.

“The extraordinary measures now being taken to protect the public and shore up our economy have exposed vulnerabilities that should help inform a comprehensive policy response,” said study co-author and ILEPI researcher Jill Gigstad. “Temporary extensions to unemployment benefits for workers and zero-interest loans for small

businesses will surely be critical in the short term, but the long-term choice on enacting a paid sick leave law is really about making sure we are better prepared for these types of disruptions in the future.”

The Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign investigates the working conditions of workers in today’s economy and elevates public discourse on issues affecting workers with research, analysis and education in order to develop and propose public policies that will reduce poverty, prevent discrimination, create more stable forms of employment, and promote middle-class jobs.

The Illinois Economic Policy Institute is a nonprofit organization which uses advanced statistics and the latest forecasting models to promote thoughtful economic growth for businesses and working families in Illinois, the Midwest, and the United States.



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