

May 28, 2020

Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Chair Patricia D. Jehlen, Vice Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Stephan Hay

**SUPPORT H.4700 & S.2701
EMERGENCY PAID SICK TIME**

Chair Jehlen, Vice Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Hay, and members of the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development:

The ACLU of Massachusetts strongly supports *An Act relative to emergency paid sick time* (H.4700/S.2701) as a critical tool to enable vulnerable workers' voluntary compliance with public health guidance and ensure equitable working conditions for the women, immigrants, and people of color who are on the economic front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this crisis, we expect people to stay home when they are sick, or when members of their households are sick. Yet too many low income jobs, including those that are sustaining our communities with food, deliveries, and other essential services during this dangerous period, do not provide adequate sick time to enable workers to simultaneously self-quarantine and maintain a paycheck. And skipping paychecks is not a luxury everyone can afford. This legislation would provide a small amount of emergency sick time for the most vulnerable workers as a means of enabling voluntary compliance with vitally important public health guidance.

Providing emergency paid sick time is a simple matter of equity and justice. COVID-19 has exposed, replicated, and exacerbated existing systemic racial disparities. Lower income urban communities that are home to large immigrant communities and communities of color, such as Chelsea and Brockton, are being hardest hit — at least in part because people living in those communities are most likely to work in essential front line jobs.¹ They are the health care workers and grocery store clerks and delivery people we depend on to keep the Commonwealth afloat. These front line jobs are also disproportionately held by women.² It is perverse that the very communities that are in greatest need of safety net protections are least likely to have them, but the state has an opportunity — indeed, an obligation — to step in.

Massachusetts has taken several important steps to protect vulnerable workers in recent years, enacting legislation to ensure the wellbeing of pregnant workers, guarantee equal pay, and establish a paid family and medical leave system, among other significant reforms. Now workers need emergency sick leave to be able to protect themselves, their families, and the broader community. As a Commonwealth, we prize safe and equitable workplaces in good times; how could we fail to enact necessary safeguards during this crisis?

We urge the Committee to give this emergency legislation a swift and favorable report.

¹ Lauren Chambers, *Data Show COVID-19 is Hitting Essential Workers and People of Color Hardest*, ACLUM: Data for Justice, Apr. 7, 2020, <https://data.aclum.org/2020/04/07/covid-19-disproportionately-affects-vulnerable-populations-in-boston/>.

² Campbell Robertson and Robert Gebeloff, *How Millions of Women Became the Most Essential Workers in America*, New York Times, Apr. 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/us/coronavirus-women-essential-workers.html>.