

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

April 1, 2022

Dear Congressional Leadership:

As Congress advances legislation to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we write today to urge you to reinstate guaranteed emergency paid sick and family caregiving leave for all U.S. workers, similar to what was passed in the bipartisan Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) at the beginning of this health crisis. This would ensure that individuals who are exposed to or contract COVID-19 and their caregivers do not have to forfeit income in order to treat their illness, protect themselves from exposure, or get a vaccine or booster that will provide robust protection against future infection.

While the number of new U.S. cases has fallen, the number of individuals suffering from ongoing COVID-related symptoms, including neurological issues, continues to increase. Emergency paid leave policies have been absolutely essential for enabling care and protection for those most at risk. President Biden has stressed the importance of these policies in his administration's emergency preparedness plan. Without an emergency paid sick and family caregiving leave policy in place, many of the most vulnerable Americans will be unable to protect themselves adequately.

The undersigned organizations represent patients and caregivers of patients who are more vulnerable during this pandemic because of a higher risk of severe COVID and complications, and because of compromised immune systems that make vaccines less effective. These vulnerable patients and their families must in part rely on the rest of us to keep them safe. We urge you to reinstate and expand guaranteed emergency paid sick days and paid family and medical leave.

Emergency paid leave is a critical public health investment for mitigating COVID-19 and preventing future waves from causing massive worker disruptions, and a key tool to strengthen women's labor force participation. It is also an immediate intervention for workers on the frontlines who have borne the brunt of the pandemic and need these protections. It has been and remains overwhelmingly popular - last month, a Navigator survey found that 82 percent of those surveyed agreed that all US workers should have access to paid sick time during the coronavirus pandemic.

The ongoing spread of COVID-19 has highlighted the health and economic consequences faced by working people when they lack access to paid leave. In the United States, more than 26 million workers lack access to paid sick days, including nearly 70 percent of the lowest wage workers. Workers in jobs that require frequent contact with the public, including those in food preparation and service, personal

home care, and child care, are among the least likely to have paid sick days and the most likely to be unable to afford to take unpaid time away from work. Furthermore, only 23 percent of the civilian workforce has access to longer-term paid family leave through their employer, and only 40 percent has access to paid medical leave through their employer.

Emergency paid sick days and paid leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) helped flatten the curve in the beginning phase of the pandemic - it was estimated to have corresponded to preventing 400 new cases of COVID-19 in states previously without sick leave per day, or more than 15,000 cases per day nationwide. However, these protections expired at the end of 2020, leaving millions of workers facing financial hardship when new variants arise. An estimated 8.8 million people – disproportionately Black and Latino – missed work due to COVID-19 illness or caregiving at the height of the Omicron wave. Six in ten of them reported losing household income, and one in five that their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat. And in the last week of January and first week of February, 12.8 million people did not work because they had COVID-19, were caring for someone who did, or their child’s school or daycare was closed. It is clear that emergency paid leave is a critically important tool for reducing the spread of this virus, particularly necessary as a response to the Omicron variant and any future variants, and it can also be an invaluable tool in supporting vaccination and testing.

We were heartened to see that in his recent National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, President Biden listed emergency paid sick days as a priority for preventing economic and educational shutdowns and said that he would “work with Congress to provide paid sick leave to workers who need to miss work due to a case of COVID-19 or to care for a loved one who has COVID-19.” As you work with the President on this critical goal, we believe that any emergency paid sick days policy must meet three key criteria:

- **Provide universal, guaranteed access.** Any emergency paid leave policy must require employers to provide this leave to all of their employees, regardless of the employer size or nature of the work. While the emergency paid sick days provision in FFCRA was incredibly effective for those who it covered, it left too many people out by excluding large employers and through various other exemptions. Any emergency paid leave policy should provide the same protections to all workers.
- **Cover multiple purposes to meet people’s needs.** Emergency paid leave should cover several key purposes to meet people’s needs during the ongoing pandemic:
 - *Leave to care for one’s own health needs* so that individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19 can quarantine while waiting for test results, and those who are sick have the time they need to recover.
 - *Leave to care for a family member’s health needs* when they are infected with COVID-19 and need care to recover.
 - *Leave to care for a family member whose school or place of care has closed* so that parents and caregivers can manage their caregiving responsibilities when faced with a sudden facility closure due to COVID-19 exposure.
 - *Vaccination leave* so that we can continue working toward the President’s goal of every American being able to access an effective vaccine. Vaccination leave should also allow workers the time off to take a family member to get vaccinated, particularly as the youngest children are able to receive a vaccination.

- **Provide sufficient leave duration and pay:** An emergency paid leave policy should provide sufficient duration and pay to include short term and longer term paid leave needs such as recovery and caregiving obligations, specific to COVID-19.

We urge Congress to swiftly reinstate and expand guaranteed emergency paid sick days and paid family and medical leave. Our society is only as healthy as its most vulnerable members. Now more than ever, we must recognize that we all have a stake in ensuring that working people have access to paid sick and safe days and paid family and medical leave.

AARP

Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators

The AIDS Institute

Alliance for Aging Research

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

American Heart Association

Association of Oncology Social Work

The Black Women's Health Imperative

Cancer Support Community

Child Neurology Foundation

COVID Survivors for Change

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

Epilepsy Foundation

Family Voices

Friends of Cancer Research

Hemophilia Federation of America

Livestrong

March of Dimes

Muscular Dystrophy Association

National Alliance for Caregiving

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

National Organization for Rare Disorders

National Patient Advocate Foundation

Susan G. Komen

Triage Cancer

U.S. Against Alzheimer's

WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease