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Weakening Sick and Safe Leave Protections Would Move Maryland Backward

Position Statement in Opposition to House Bill 1015

Given before the House Economic Matters Committee

Maryland made great strides in 2018 when the General Assembly set basic standards that ensure most Marylanders have access to paid sick days. The Healthy Working Families Act provided paid sick days for about 488,000 Marylanders and extended important job protections to thousands of additional employees at small businesses.ⁱ Paid sick days are essential for working families, public health, and the economy. Weakening workers' existing protections by making it more difficult for them to use paid sick leave would move Maryland backward. For these reasons, **the Maryland Center on Economic Policy opposes House Bill 1015.**

House Bill 1015 would force many workers to go an even longer period of time without being allowed to use their accrued sick and safe leave than under current law – extending the period to 120 days from 106 days that employers can prohibit employees from taking time off. Extending the already significant period that a worker cannot use their accrued leave reduces the economic and public health benefits Maryland gained under the 2018 law.

Workers with paid sick leave are more likely to receive preventive care that will lead to the early detection and treatment of illnesses.ⁱⁱ Cities and states that guarantee earned sick days have lower rates of flu infection. The reduced health care costs associated with paid sick leave (due to less contagious disease, less reliance on emergency rooms, and fewer short-term stays in nursing homes) are expected to save Marylanders an estimated \$23 million each year. Reducing the opportunity for workers to use their leave would in turn limit these benefits.

Guaranteeing access to paid sick days supports a vibrant and growing economy. As has become all too clear over the last three years, forcing workers to go to work while sick – or to choose between their health and their livelihood – promotes disease transmission and thereby prevents our economy from firing on all cylinders. Even surveys by anti-regulation political consultants have found that a majority of business owners and executives support earned sick days.ⁱⁱⁱ

After decades of stagnant wages and eroding power, Maryland workers won an important victory when lawmakers passed the Healthy Working Families Act. House Bill 1015 would weaken workers' existing protections and would be a step backward for working Marylander and for public health.

For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy respectfully requests that the Economic Matters Committee make an unfavorable report on House Bill 1015.

Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 1015

Bill summary

House Bill 1015 would extend the time period before a worker can use their earned sick and safe leave to 120 days from 106 days.

Background

The General Assembly in 2018 passed the Healthy Working Families Act, overriding then-Gov. Hogan's veto of the bill when it originally passed in 2017. The bill guarantees most Maryland workers the ability to earn paid time off work for when they or a family member have medical needs or face an unsafe home environment.

Equity Implications

House Bill 1015 poses significant equity concerns. Weakening current protections would likely most seriously harm workers who previously lacked paid sick days altogether. Before the Health Working Families Act, 58 percent of Latinx workers in Maryland were unable to earn paid sick days, as were 77 percent of part-time workers and 70 percent of full-time workers taking home less than \$15,000 per year.^{iv}

Impact

House Bill 1015 would likely **worsen racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ Christopher Meyer, "A Strong Earned Sick Days Law Will Bring Major Benefits for Maryland Families and our Economy," Maryland Center on Economic Policy, November 2017. <http://www.mdeconomy.org/sickleave/>

ⁱⁱ Jessica Milli, "Access to Paid Sick Time in Maryland," Institute for Women's Policy Research, January 2017, <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/B364-MD-Paid-Sick-Time-Access-6.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ "CMD PRWatch Markup of 01-05-16 State Chambers Topline Poll," Luntz Global via PRWach, 2015, https://www.prwatch.org/files/cmd_prwatch_markup_of_01-05-16_state_chambers_topline_poll.pdf

^{iv} Milli 2017.