

# Weakening Sick and Safe Leave Protections Would Move Maryland Backward

## Position Statement in Opposition to House Bill 1021

*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.<sup>i</sup> 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 1021.

House Bill 1021 could 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.<sup>ii</sup> 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. Guaranteeing earned sick days saves Maryland employers up to \$13 million per year through improved productivity. On average, cities and states that passed earned sick days guarantees had equivalent or stronger job growth in comparison to the United States overall 12 months after implementation. A majority of business owners and executives support earned sick days, even when polled by anti-regulation political consultants.<sup>iii</sup>

After decades of stagnant wages and eroding power, Maryland workers won an important victory when lawmakers passed the Healthy Working Families Act. House Bill 1021 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 House Economic Matters Committee make an unfavorable report on House Bill 1021.**

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## Equity Impact Analysis: House Bill 1021

### *Bill summary*

House Bill 1021 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 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 1021 poses significant equity concerns. Weakening current protections would likely most seriously harm workers who previously lacked paid sick days altogether. As of 2015, 58 percent of Latinx workers 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.<sup>iv</sup>

In addition, workers of color are more likely to be engaged in short-term work, and therefore would be more likely to lose the ability to use sick leave under this legislation. People of every other racial group are twice as likely as whites to work less than half the year.

### *Impact*

House Bill 1021 would likely **worsen racial and economic equity** in Maryland.

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<sup>i</sup> 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/>

<sup>ii</sup> 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>

<sup>iii</sup> "CMD PRWatch Markup of 01-05-16 State Chambers Topline Poll," Luntz Global via PRWacth, 2015, [https://www.prwatch.org/files/cmd\\_prwatch\\_markup\\_of\\_01-05-16\\_state\\_chambers\\_topline\\_poll.pdf](https://www.prwatch.org/files/cmd_prwatch_markup_of_01-05-16_state_chambers_topline_poll.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Milli 2017.