

Fact Sheet

IWPR No. B265

October 2008

Paid Sick Days Initiative Would Support Milwaukee Victims of Domestic Violence

By Vicky Lovell, Ph.D.

Milwaukee's paid sick days referendum would allow workers to take time from their scheduled hours on the job to recover from illness. It would also guarantee more than 260,000 Milwaukeeans the ability to access services for domestic violence and sexual assault, without the risk of losing wages or a job.¹ While a relatively small number of Milwaukee workers will likely need paid time off for these purposes, this job-protected paid time off could be critical to building family safety and security.

- Every year, nearly 8,500 Milwaukeeans report experiencing intimate partner violence.²
- Nearly 2,700 calls were made to the Sojourner Truth House's domestic violence hotline by individuals in crisis in 2007.³
- According to Milwaukee's Task Force on Family Violence, flexible leave is a key part of a "safe work environment" for domestic violence victims.⁴

Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault may need to urgently seek medical care, obtain a Domestic Abuse Injunction, and gain shelter, to protect themselves and their children from further harm. Once they are safe from imminent threats, they need time to address the effects of trauma on themselves and their children, follow up with law enforcement, attend and participate in the judicial process, and work with case managers. Victims who are employed may only be able to access these services during their regularly scheduled work hours. For them, paid time off can make the difference between getting critically important help when it's needed, or delaying their move into a safe situation.

- Battered women may temporarily be unable to go to work because of injuries or visible bruising.⁵
- Temporary emergency refuge may only be available at a shelter too far from work.⁶
- Women who have experienced domestic violence have more health problems⁷ and are two to three times as likely to experience depression, anxiety disorder, or PTSD⁸ as women who have not, as a direct result of the violence. If untreated, these problems can prevent victims of domestic violence from maintaining economic stability through employment.⁹

Nationally, our economy loses nearly \$6 billion annually because of domestic violence and sexual assault. Most of these costs (\$4.1 billion) are for medical services. Public funding covers approximately \$820,000 of those costs. And 8 million workdays are lost per year to nonfatal domestic violence.¹⁰

- One of every eight victims of intimate partner physical assault needs medical care; nearly one in ten is treated at a hospital.¹¹
- 18 percent of victims of physical assault, 22 percent of rape victims, and 35 percent of victims of stalking miss some work because of the assault.¹²

A little time to find safe housing close to work, get medical care, or seek a restraining order may be just the help a domestic violence victim needs to keep her job, care for her family, and get her life back on track.

Milwaukee's paid sick days referendum would allow workers to earn paid sick time at the rate of one hour of paid leave for every 30 hours of paid work. Once workers have been employed for 90 days, accrued leave could be used for a worker's own health-care needs, to care for a family member's health, or to seek medical care, victim services, or counseling, or move or take legal action, related to domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking. Workers in firms with 10 or more employees could take up to 72 hours of earned paid sick time in a year; those in smaller firms could use up to 40 hours annually.

- The Institute for Women's Policy Research estimates that wages, payroll-based taxes, and administrative costs for Milwaukeeans using their paid sick time for domestic abuse, sexual assault, or stalking would total \$450,000 per year.¹³
- Employers would experience substantial benefits from universal paid sick days in reduced turnover costs and improved productivity.¹⁴

¹ Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of data from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

² Wisconsin Department of Justice (2007), *2006 Domestic Abuse Incident Report (DAIR)* <<http://www.doj.state.wi.us/cvs/documents/DAR/2006DAR/2006DAR.pdf>> (April 30, 2008).

³ Sojourner Truth House (n.d.), *Annual Report 2007* <<http://www.sojournertruthhouse.org/pdfs/AnnualReport2007.pdf>> (September 28, 2008).

⁴ Task Force on Family Violence (2008), *When Family Violence Comes to Work* <<http://www.tffv.org/programsandservices/familyviolence.htm>> (September 28, 2008).

⁵ Angela M. Moe and Myrtle P. Bell (2004), "Abject Economics: The Effects of Battering and Violence on Women's Work and Employability" (*Violence Against Women* 10 (January): 29-55).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Cheryl A. Sutherland, Cris M. Sullivan, and Deborah I. Bybee (2001), "Effects of Intimate Partner Violence Versus Poverty on Women's Health" (*Violence Against Women* 7 (October): 1122-1143).

⁸ Richard M. Tolman and Daniel Rosen (2001), "Domestic Violence in the Lives of Women Receiving Welfare" (*Violence Against Women* 7 (February): 141-158).

⁹ Angela Browne, Amy Salomon, and Shari S. Bassuk (1999), "The Impact of Recent Partner Violence on Poor Women's Capacity to Maintain Work" (*Violence Against Women* 5 (April): 393-426).

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2003), *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States* <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/ipv_cost/ipv.htm> (September 28, 2008).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Vicky Lovell (2008), *Valuing Good Health in Milwaukee: The Costs and Benefits of Paid Sick Days* <<http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/Milwaukee.pdf>> (September 9, 2008).

¹⁴ Ibid.

IWPR thanks The Women's Fund of Greater Milwaukee, the Ford Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their support for our research on paid sick days.

For more information on IWPR reports or membership, please call (202) 785-5100, email iwpr@iwpr.org, or visit www.iwpr.org.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University.