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March 10, 2020

The Honorable Alma S. Adams
Chair
Workforce Protections Subcommittee
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bradley Byrne
Ranking Member
Workforce Protections Subcommittee
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support the Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784)

Dear Chair Adams and Ranking Member Byrne:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 220 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, **we urge your support for H.R. 1784, the Healthy Families Act**, which would guarantee working people the ability to earn up to seven paid sick days a year to recover from short-term illnesses, access preventive care, care for a sick family member or seek assistance related to domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking.

This bill is an important step toward ensuring the economic security and well-being of working families throughout the United States and is a priority of The Leadership Conference. We ask that this statement be entered into the record of the Subcommittee hearing entitled, "The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1784): Examining a Plan to Secure Paid Sick Leave for U.S. Workers," scheduled for Wednesday, March 11, 2020.

Everyone gets sick, but not everyone has time to get better. Ten states and 23 jurisdictions in the United States provide, or will soon provide, working people with paid sick days.¹ Research shows that paid sick days benefits working people, their

¹ National Partnership for Women & Families, Fact Sheet, Current Paid Sick Days Laws (May 2019), <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/current-paid-sick-days-laws.pdf>.

families, and the public health.² Yet, there are still more than 30 million people in the United States that lack access to even one guaranteed paid sick day to recover from a short-term illness, and millions more cannot earn time to care for a sick child or family member.³ Lack of paid sick days forces many working people to make an impossible choice between meeting their health needs, or the needs of their families, and keeping a paycheck or job. The Healthy Families Act will help all working people in America—no matter where they live or work—balance their health and financial needs.

The Healthy Families Act is especially important for working people in low-wage jobs as they are the least likely to have paid sick days but the most likely to be struggling to make ends meet.⁴ People of color, who are over-represented in the low-wage workforce, are also less likely to be able to access paid sick days. According to an analysis of the 2014 National Health Interview Survey, working people who identify as Hispanic are the least likely to have access to paid sick days, with more than half of Hispanic workers unable to earn a single paid sick day through their jobs. Forty-seven percent of workers identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native lack access to paid sick days, and 38 percent of working people who identify as Black—including 41 percent of Black men and 36 percent of Black women—have no paid sick days.⁵ For the average person without paid sick days, two days of unpaid sick time can mean losing a month's worth of gas; three days can mean the loss of an entire month's worth of groceries or the inability to pay for utilities like electricity and heat; seven or more days of unpaid sick time can mean missing a monthly rent or mortgage payment.⁶ Providing working people with the ability to earn paid sick days would allow working people to take time off to care for themselves without risking economic insecurity.

Paid sick days not only promote the economic and physical well-being of families, but also promotes public health. The vast majority of people working in food service (81 percent) and in the personal care and service industry (75 percent)—occupations that require frequent contact with the public—lack access to paid sick days.⁷ They are also the most likely to be unable to afford to take an unpaid day away from work. Indeed, people without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely than those with paid sick days to report going to work with a contagious illness

² See John Marotta and Solomon Greene, The Urban Institute, Paid Sick Days: What Does the Research Tell Us About the Effectiveness of Local Action (Jan. 2019), https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99648/paid_sick_days_what_does_the_research_tell_us_about_the_effectiveness_of_local_action_0.pdf.

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 2791, National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2019 (Table 31 and Appendix Table 2) (Sept. 2019), <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2019.pdf>.

⁴ Elise Gould and Jessica Schieder, Economic Policy Institute, Work Sick or Lose Pay? The High Cost of Being Sick When You Don't Get Paid Sick Days (Jun 28, 2017), <https://www.epi.org/publication/work-sick-or-lose-pay-the-high-cost-of-being-sick-when-you-dont-get-paid-sick-days/>.

⁵ Institute for Women's Policy Research, Briefing Paper, Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings (Feb. 2016), <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/B356.pdf>.

⁶ Gould and Schieder, *supra* note 4.

⁷ Institute for Women's Policy Research, *supra* note 5.

like the flu or other viral infections, putting customers, colleagues, and the public at risk of illness.⁸ Working parents without paid sick days are also nearly twice as likely as those with paid sick days to send a sick child to school or day care, which exposes classmates, teachers, school staff, and child care providers to illness;⁹ however, many working parents, particularly working mothers who still overwhelmingly have primary responsibility for meeting their children's health needs, feel they have no choice. Further, individuals without paid sick days are more likely to delay needed medical care, which can lead to prolonged illnesses and turn minor health problems into major, more costly ones.¹⁰

These public health considerations are especially important now as our nation faces a potential pandemic with the COVID-19 virus. In developing a response to the coronavirus, Congress must take into account the cost of unpaid sick time to public health and support the ability of all working people to access paid sick days, and other supports, to recover from illness, seek medical care, or care for a loved one.

Just as paid sick days support the economic security and well-being of working people and their families, paid "safe" days are critical to ensuring that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking have the ability to seek safety and care for themselves. Financial insecurity is a barrier for many survivors seeking assistance. For example, in a 2018 survey of domestic violence survivors, nearly three-fourths (73 percent) reported that financial problems forced them to remain with their abusers longer than they wanted, or to return after having left, and more than half (53 percent) said they lost a job because of the abuse.¹¹ The ability to seek assistance without having to fear that you may lose your job, or your paycheck, is crucial for survivors seeking safety. Similarly, survivors of sexual assault and stalking may also require time away from work to receive treatment and to take steps to promote their safety. By guaranteeing the use of paid sick time to seek assistance and care, the Healthy Families Act helps provide survivors with a chance to address their needs.

Everyone should be able to care for themselves or a sick loved one without risking financial insecurity or job loss. For these reasons, we urge you to support H.R. 1784, the Healthy Families Act. If you have any questions, please contact Gaylynn Burroughs, Senior Policy Counsel, at burroughs@civilrights.org or (202) 466-3311.

⁸ National Partnership for Women & Families, *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences: Key Findings from the 2010 NORC/Public Welfare Foundation National Survey on Paid Sick Days*, available at <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-attitudes-and-experiences-presentation.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ LeaAnne DeRigne, Patricia Stoddard-Dare, and Linda Quinn, *Workers Without Paid Sick Leave Less Likely to Take Time Off for Illness or Injury Compared to Those With Paid Sick Leave*, *Health Affairs* (Mar. 2016), <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0965>.

¹¹ Cynthia Hess and Alona Del Rosario, Institute for Women's Policy Research, *Dreams Deferred: A Survey on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Survivors' Education, Careers, and Economic Security* (2018), https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/C474_IWPR-Report-Dreams-Deferred.pdf.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Vanita Gupta". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Vanita Gupta
President & CEO