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WIDESPREAD LACK OF PAID SICK DAYS PUTS WORKERS AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH AT RISK ACCORDING TO "SICK IN THE CITY," A NEW STUDY BY COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY AND A BETTER BALANCE

New York, NY -- Findings from a survey of New Yorkers provide some of the most compelling evidence to date supporting public health arguments for paid sick leave laws in New York City and around the nation. The study, "**Sick in the City: What the Lack of Paid Leave Means for Working New Yorkers**" being released today by The Community Service Society (CSS) and A Better Balance (ABB), found that low-income workers without paid sick leave are more likely to go to work sick, send sick children to school, be threatened by their employers, and use the emergency room for medical care than similar workers with paid sick days. With widespread concerns about the flu and legislation to require paid sick days pending before the New York City Council, this research provides important new data on the implications of lack of paid sick days for the spread of contagious illnesses and health care costs.

David R. Jones, president and CEO of CSS, said, "We estimate that at least 1.3 million New Yorkers do not have paid leave of any kind. Approximately two-thirds of all low-wage workers work without paid sick leave. Most New Yorkers do not realize the crises this lack of coverage causes for working families, who are too often faced with choices nobody should have to make – going to work sick and sending their child to school sick, or losing their job. This practice provides a serious public health risk."

"Sick in the City" also found that low-income Latinos were more likely to work in jobs that do not offer paid sick leave. In addition, workers in union households were more likely to have paid sick leave. Workers with frequent contact with the public (those in leisure, hospitality, and retail), and workers in small businesses were least likely to have paid sick leave – more than one in four respondents without paid sick leave work for an employer with 10 or fewer employees.

The number of New Yorkers without paid sick leave has grown substantially in recent years. Jeremy Reiss, Director of Workforce and Economic Security at CSS and co-author of the report, "Sick in the City," said, "The number of New Yorkers without paid sick leave has catapulted in recent years. We have always known that the lowest-wage workers lack employer sponsored benefits, including paid sick leave, but we see sharp increases in the number of workers in near-poor and moderate-income households without paid sick leave." For workers in households earning

between 100 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately \$18,000 to \$36,000 a year for a family of three), for instance, only 33 percent received paid sick leave in 2009 compared to 43 percent in 2008.

Nancy Rankin, head of research for A Better Balance and co-author of “Sick in the City,” pointed to lack of sick leave as an important missing piece of health care reform. “While Congress and the President wrestle with fixing America’s health care system,” she said, “many workers struggle with the everyday crisis of simply being able to take time off from work to go to the doctor or cool a feverish child’s forehead. Regardless of their insurance coverage, they cannot get needed treatment and time to recover because they cannot afford to lose their pay.”

“Sick in the City” revealed the following public health risks:

- More than 7 in 10 low-income workers without paid sick leave reported going to work sick in the last year.
- Thirty percent of low-income working parents without paid sick leave report that in the last year they sent a sick child to school or day care because they could not take time off from work.
- Low-income workers with no paid sick leave were nearly twice as likely to report that their employer threatened to fire, suspend, write up, or otherwise penalize them for wanting to take time off to recover from an illness or to care for a sick child (17 percent of workers without paid sick leave versus 9 percent of workers with paid sick leave).
- Nearly one in four low-wage workers without paid sick leave relied on high-cost hospital emergency rooms because they could not get time off from their jobs.

“Sick in the City” relies on eight years of data from CSS’ *The Unheard Third*, an annual survey of low-income New Yorkers which has been conducted since 2002. In the 2009 survey, CSS partnered with A Better Balance to further explore paid sick leave and its public health consequences. *The Unheard Third* is the only survey nationally to regularly assess political priorities and personal hardships of low-income urban residents. CSS conducts *The Unheard Third* in collaboration with Lake Research Partners, a leading market research firm based in Washington D.C.

View a copy of the report, “Sick in the City,” at http://www.cssny.org/media_center/

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For 160 years, the Community Service Society of New York has been the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers and continues to advocate for the economic security of the working poor in the nation’s largest city. www.cssny.org

A Better Balance is a legal advocacy organization fighting to give American workers the time and flexibility they need to care for their families. We’re leaders in the movement to reshape laws and workplace practices to fit the needs of today’s labor force. www.abetterbalance.org