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NEW JERSEY COALITION SUPPORTS FEDERAL BILL CALLING FOR PAID TIME OFF FOR FAMILY ILLNESS AND EMERGENCIES

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ -- New Jersey workers forced to choose between responding to family needs in an emergency and showing up for work to earn a day's pay may get relief through the Healthy Families Act, sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), which is scheduled to be introduced in Congress on June 15.

Advocates have argued that lack of sick leave for workers, particularly the lowest paid, hurts their ability to provide nurturing support and compassion to loved ones and harms families and communities. Nationally, two-thirds of low-income mothers and more than one-third of moderate and upper income mothers who miss work when a child is sick also lose pay. In New Jersey, one in five companies provide no paid sick leave for workers, according to a study by the New Jersey Business and Industry Association.

"Everyone benefits when workers are able to balance job obligations and family needs," said Eileen Appelbaum, director of the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. "Giving workers financial security by allowing them to take paid leave for their own illnesses or to deal with a child's flu not only improves outcomes for children and families, but also worker morale and productivity."

The Healthy Families Act would require all employers with at least 25 or more employees to provide seven days of paid sick leave annually for full time employees (working at least 30 hours per week or 1,500 hours per year) and a pro rata amount of leave for part-time employees working at least 15 hours per week or 750 hours per year. Employers currently meeting minimum standards would not be required to modify existing paid leave policies.

The Healthy Families Act is supported by the New Jersey Time to Care Coalition, a growing coalition of labor unions, community based organizations, educational organizations, senior advocacy groups, advocates for families and children, and advocates for the disabled seeking to obtain paid family and medical leave for New Jersey's unprotected workers and their families.