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Kennedy and DeLauro reintroduce the Healthy Families Act **ACORN member Bertha Brown speaks about working without paid sick days.**

Sen. Ted Kennedy and Rep. Rosa DeLauro spoke about the need for mandatory sick days at a rally held March 13 at the Russell State Office Building in Washington, D.C. They later reintroduced the **Healthy Families Act**.

"I have paid sick leave. The President has paid sick leave. Every member of Congress has paid sick leave, and you should have paid sick leave too," Kennedy said. "It's good for the economy."

DeLauro added, "It's a basic right in the workplace to have paid sick leave."

ACORN member Bertha Brown, a home care worker from Philadelphia who has no paid sick leave, spoke movingly to the crowd:

"My name is Bertha Brown and I am a home care worker from Philadelphia. I am here to tell you that I understand firsthand how important the Healthy Families Act is. I've been in health care for 18 years, and I've never had paid sick days when I care for clients in their home – even when I work full time.

I am 48 years old and a single parent with two daughters - ages 11 and 7 – living with me at home. At \$7 an hour, I scrape by from month to month, and I cannot afford to lose a day of pay without serious financial consequences.

A utility bill this winter was \$135 a month – that's more than two days of work for me!

I almost never miss work, even when I'm sick, because I honestly can't afford to.

I work with elderly clients in their homes. I don't want to expose them when I know I'm sick, but I still make myself go to work. When I'm coughing or feverish, I wear facemasks and gloves so I am not exposing them anymore than I have to.

But I am only human, and sometimes I am just too sick to work. When that happens, the agency is very angry and more than once they have retaliated by taking away my client and assigning another caregiver to them. Until we have guaranteed paid sick days, I guess the only way to avoid retaliation is to never get sick?

But the worst thing about not having paid sick days is the choices it forces you to make as a parent. When one of my kids is sick, I want to be there with her – to take care of her and comfort her like any parent would. But then how do I keep a roof over their heads if I am losing pay? I'm caught between a rock and a hard place and I am just trying to make the best of a bad situation.

And it's just not fair to my kids. When my kids feel sick in the morning, I sometimes just give them Tylenol in the hopes that they feel better for a while so I can go to work. I hate doing this, but what choice do I have?

One time, when my daughter was 6, I gave her the Tylenol in the hopes I could get through a few hours at work. In the middle of the day, the school nurse called and told me I had to come and pick her up. By the time I arrived at school, my daughter had soiled herself and was vomiting.

When I have to send my kids to school sick, we both suffer. I remember clearly my daughter once saying, "Mommy, you love working more than you love me." That hit me hard. I felt like I had been punched in the face. My kids look at me differently now - like I'm not dependable. It really hurts. I want to be a good parent, but how can I do that when I can't pay the bills?

You're darned if you do, darned if you don't. And it's just not right.

That's why ACORN is out here today in force – to support the Healthy Families Act. And that's why we are joining with our allies to move paid sick days legislation in seven states.

ACORN believes that you should be able to work hard and care for yourself and your family. We are here to send that message loud and clear to all of our members of Congress.

We will fight until no American worker has to choose between getting better and getting paid --- until no parent has to look their kid in the eye and try to explain to them why they can't get the care they deserve."