



***Healthy Workers, Thriving Wisconsin:
Solutions Addressing Lack of Income as a Barrier to COVID-19 Isolation and Quarantine***

Statement for the Press
Chineva Smith, Wisconsin Senior Organizer for 9to5
1/27/21

Paid leave and paid sick days is very crucial for all residents of WI. 9to5 launched the Keep Families 1st Coalition to help win WI FMLA.

Twelve and a half years ago, 9to5, Voces de la Frontera, and dozens of other groups organized a ballot initiative to win paid sick days in Milwaukee. Our partners included groups like Fight Asthma Milwaukee, the Black Health Coalition, the Latino Health Coalition, and many public health professionals.

They knew what the pandemic and this report spotlight: our lives are interdependent. Each of us is only as healthy as the person who prepares and serves our food, drives our children's school bus, delivers our packages, cares for our loved ones with a chronic illness or disability.

We won a paid sick days ballot initiative in Milwaukee decisively in November of 2008, but faced a lawsuit from corporate lobbies. It was also overturned by the Walker administration through preemption. Eventually we won in the courts. And then conservatives in the WI legislature took away the right for cities to make decisions about their own communities when it comes to issues like paid time to care. They stole our win and put tens of thousands of Milwaukee residents in peril.

Many 9to5 WI members remain at risk as a result. They are largely people of color and low income, mostly women. Not only do we have one of the most povertized zip codes in the nation, but we are also notorious for being known as one of the worst states to raise an African American family. We have failed school systems, the prison pipeline, and a plethora of other oppressive systems that infinitely affect people of color and other marginalized groups. Wisconsin is a state where A lot of women also serve as caregivers inside & outside their homes. They are essential workers who do the work our city depends on, but their jobs are typically under-valued because of the legacy of race and gender discrimination. For them, taking time to quarantine or isolate if they're exposed to COVID-19 means risking their pay and, for many, their jobs. It is not fair or humane to put anyone in a situation where they are given an ultimatum to choose between any essential of their livelihood.

We welcome the work of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. It reinforces earlier findings by a [Health Affairs](#) study last October that showed access to paid sick days significantly decreased the number of reported new COVID-19 cases, with 56% fewer cases occurring as a result of the last year's federal coronavirus relief legislation.

This science is precisely what we need to guide public policy. Our physical and economic health depend on it.

Wisconsin needed statewide paid family leave and paid sick days before the COVID-19 pandemic and it is evident that Wisconsin will need it in the near future.