

# The Healthy Families Act Will Support People with Disabilities and their Families



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## Policy Brief

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### Current Status

Today, half of all U.S. workers and three-quarters of all low-income workers do not receive a single *paid* sick day to take care of themselves or a family member<sup>1</sup>. This inequity is especially burdensome for families raising children with disabilities because their children typically have higher rates of illness, caregiving needs, and school absence than nondisabled children<sup>1</sup>. In addition, families of children with

disabilities are more likely to live in poverty<sup>2</sup>, which magnifies the impact of the loss of a day's wages when a parent must take time off from work to care for a sick child.

If enacted, the **Healthy Families Act** would provide a minimum of 7 days of paid sick leave for American workers<sup>3</sup>, thereby creating a safety net for those struggling to balance work and family responsibilities.

### How the Act Will Help

- **Caregiver Security:** The majority of US caregivers are also in the workforce: almost 80% of single-parent households work full time<sup>4</sup>, and 64% of two-parent households are dual-earner households<sup>5</sup>. Because families raising children with disabilities face higher caregiving costs, these households also face a greater need to have multiple earners<sup>2,6,7</sup>. Despite the overlap of family and work responsibilities, US policies have not kept pace with the realities of today's workforce. Even workers who *are* eligible for paid sick leave often find that their leave is restricted to personal illness and cannot be used to care for a family member<sup>8</sup>. The **Healthy Families Act** aligns policy with the demands facing today's workforce and would allow workers to use paid sick leave for either themselves or when they need to provide care for their families.
- **Financial Security:** In a recent study of the use of sick leave, 41% of parents reported not taking leave to care for a chronically ill child because either they could not afford to lose pay or they were afraid of losing their job<sup>9</sup>. American workers fear negative consequences from taking caregiver leave. These fears particularly affect families of individuals with disabilities because many of these families have already been penalized with limited work opportunities due to their caregiving responsibilities<sup>2</sup>. As mandated by the **Healthy Families Act**, a minimum number of paid sick days ensures that families have the income and job security to care for themselves and their children.
- **Fills policy gaps:** Millions of workers have been helped by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that made provisions for most workers to take unpaid leave to care for a family member<sup>10</sup>. However, more than 40% of American households are "asset poor,"<sup>11</sup> meaning they have no financial cushion to carry them through critical times such as the loss of income that accompanies taking advantage of the FMLA. Indeed, 3 of 4 workers who were eligible for FMLA and who needed to take leave, reported that they did not take it because they could not afford the loss of a regular paycheck<sup>12</sup>. Of the 25% of workers who took FMLA leave, 10% were forced to seek public assistance to meet their families' basic needs<sup>12</sup>.

Paid leave is imperative before most working families, especially families of children with disabilities, will be able to benefit from policy provisions aiming to create a supportive, family-friendly environment.

## The Healthy Families Act (S 910)

The Healthy Families Act is important legislation for all of America's working families; however, it is even more critical for families raising children with disabilities because they face increased living costs and elevated caregiving responsibilities related to their child's disability. The **Healthy Families Act** offers a critical step toward helping these families balance their work and caregiving responsibilities.

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## Notes

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