



February 9, 2015

Burke Harr, Chairperson  
Business and Labor Committee  
Room 2000, State Capitol  
Lincoln, NE 68509

*RE: Support of LB 493*

Dear Chairman Harr and members of the Business and Labor Committee,

My name is James Goddard, and I am the Director of the Economic Justice and Health Care Access Programs at Nebraska Appleseed. Nebraska Appleseed is a nonprofit organization that fights for justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans. I am here today to testify in support of LB 493.

Working hard and taking care of our families are Nebraska values. Accordingly, it is crucial that our state has policies that support a strong workforce, productive employees, and healthy families. This means that Nebraska's workers should not have to choose between financial stability and their health or safety.

But unfortunately, very few employees, particularly low-income employees, are shielded from the economic instability that can result from taking time off work for illness or to care for a family member.<sup>i</sup> While this instability is experienced by individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds, for low-income families taking time off can be even more challenging. In recovering from the most recent recession, many of the fastest-growing jobs in the United States have been in low-wage service and retail sectors.<sup>ii</sup> These positions, such as retail salespersons, restaurant staff, and personal and home aides, are unlikely to come with the benefits, like paid sick and safe leave, associated with higher paying positions.<sup>iii</sup>

Indeed, lack of paid leave is particularly challenging for low-income mothers and their families. In 2012, there were 26,325 female-headed, low-income working families in Nebraska.<sup>iv</sup> These working mothers are often forced to choose between caring for themselves or their families and losing wages. In fact, almost one in five low-wage working mothers reported having lost a job due to sickness or caring for a family member.<sup>v</sup> Victims of domestic violence are at an even greater risk. According to the National Network to End

Domestic Violence, up to half of all victims have lost a job due, at least in part, to domestic violence.<sup>vi</sup>

LB 493 helps to address these issues by allowing employees to accrue up to 40 hours of paid leave annually. Specifically, the bill allows employees to utilize paid leave for their own physical or mental health needs, the needs of a family member or for needs related to domestic violence. This allows employees to seek necessary medical care for themselves or a loved one, and can help them be healthier in their place of work. The bill also helps victims of domestic violence gain economic security, which can often be what is needed to get out of an abusive situation.

In short, by providing eligible employees with the opportunity to access paid sick and safe leave, LB 493 helps to ensure the health and stability of Nebraska's workers and their families, benefitting our communities and our state as a whole.

For all these reasons, we urge this committee to advance LB 493.

Sincerely,  
NEBRASKA APPLESEED



James Goddard, J.D.  
Director, Economic Justice and Health Care Access Programs

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<sup>i</sup> Only 30% of low-wage workers have paid sick days, compared to 84% of high-wage workers. Liz Ben-Ishi, "Access to Paid Leave: An Overlooked Aspect of Economic and Social Inequality," CLASP, April 2014, p. 1, [http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/2014-04-09-Inequities-and-Paid-Leave-Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/2014-04-09-Inequities-and-Paid-Leave-Brief_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> National Employment Law Project, "The Low-Wage Recovery and Growing Inequality," Aug. 2012, [http://nelp.3cdn.net/8ee4a46a37c86939c0\\_qjm6bkhe0.pdf](http://nelp.3cdn.net/8ee4a46a37c86939c0_qjm6bkhe0.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> This is not solely a Nebraska issue; the United States is the only advanced economy that fails to guarantee paid leave for some portion of parental leave. See Deborah Povich, Brandon Roberts and Mark Mather, "Low-Income Working Mothers and State Policy: Investing for a Better Economic Future," The Working Poor Families Project, Winter 2013-2014, p. 7, [http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/WFPF\\_Low-Income-Working-Mothers-Report\\_021214.pdf](http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/WFPF_Low-Income-Working-Mothers-Report_021214.pdf). Note that although the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) guarantees the availability of sick or family leave for some workers, the FMLA only covers around half of American workers and only provides *unpaid* leave. The FMLA's reach is limited because it applies only to employees who have been in a job for at least one year at an employer with 50 or more employees. See Ben-Ishi, at 6.

<sup>iv</sup> Povich, Roberts, and Mather at 13.

<sup>v</sup> Ben-Ishi, at 1.

<sup>vi</sup> See <http://nnedv.org/news/4431-nnedv-calls-on-congress-to-pass-paid-sick-days-for-survivors.html?highlight=WyjwYWkIiwic2FmZSIsInNhZmUncyIsImxIYXZlIi0=>