



February 8, 2021

Senator Ben Hansen
Chairperson, Business & Labor
State Capitol, Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Support for LB 258

Dear Chairperson Hansen and committee members,

Nebraska Appleseed is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to justice and opportunity for all Nebraskans. We work closely with Nebraskans working in jobs where they often do not have access to paid sick leave. While a dire issue before the pandemic, it is now more critical than ever to have access to basic, earned paid sick leave. We support LB 258 which promotes healthier and stronger families, especially working parents with young children.

For many years, Nebraska Appleseed has trained more than 600 workers per year in communities across the state in worker health and safety. One of the most common concerns we hear in addition to injury rates is that workers cannot take a day from work to care for a sick child or themselves, or they are penalized for doing so. **Access to basic paid sick leave consistently emerges as a priority for Nebraskans working essential jobs across our state.**¹ One Nebraska worker explained, “If they [employer] don’t care about us -- the health of their workers -- then they’re going to care even less if it’s your child.” Another worker described, “At my work, we can arrange in advance for time off for something more serious like a surgery. But if I’m sick one day, I can’t take the day off. There is no paid time off, and they’ll give me a point

¹ Studies in Nebraska and across the country document the common and long-time lack of access to paid sick leave in the meat and poultry industry, among others. For example, “*The Speed Kills You*”: *The Voice of Nebraska’s Meatpacking Workers* (Nebraska Appleseed, 2009) surveyed 455 Nebraska meatpacking workers in 5 communities across the state and found 47% of respondents said their employer did not provide paid sick days. Others experienced a variety of other pressures not to use available sick leave. A 2016 U.S. Government Accountability Report concluded: “NIOSH officials...attribute some underreporting [of injuries] in the meat and poultry industry to a lack of paid sick leave, which may cause injured or ill workers to stay on the job so they can get paid. For example, some poultry plants use point systems to track sick days and may penalize workers.” (*Workplace Safety and Health: Additional Data Needed to Address Continued Hazards in the Meat and Poultry Industry*, GAO 2016).

[penalty] as well.” From a food production worker, “If you’re sick and working on the line, we’re wiping our nose on our sleeves to try to make sure it doesn’t drip on the food. If I have a fever in addition to a runny nose, they’ll let me go home, but they’ll give me half a point penalty and it’s not paid time off to get better.”²

For lower-income families, losing just a few days of wages can break the household budget: for an average worker earning between \$40,000 to \$49,000 annually, just 2 days of lost wages are equivalent to a month’s worth of gas, and just 3 days are equivalent to a month of utilities or groceries.³ In just the first 2 years of life, parents can expect their children to catch 8 to 10 colds,⁴ and it is estimated that over 77% of school aged children miss at least one school day per year due to an illness or injury.⁵ When parents are unable to take time off to stay at home with their children, they are more likely to send their children to school or daycare, where children will go on to spread illness to others.⁶ This is particularly concerning during an unprecedented pandemic where we are trying to keep families and communities financially stable and healthy.

Paid sick days provide financial stability for families and benefit local businesses. Workers with access to paid sick days are 28% less likely to be injured on the job than workers who do not have paid sick days.⁷ In states with paid sick time policies, the vast majority of employers reported that the policy had a minimal financial impact, and they had even seen *positive* business and job growth in their local economy.⁸ A universal paid sick day policy is estimated to reduce workplace transmissions of the flu by 6%, ensuring that other employees remain healthy when one worker is ill.⁹ Paid sick leave is therefore a crucial component in alleviating COVID-19

² Other company policies, such as “points systems,” layer additional pressures to work while sick and even to avoid using sick time when it is provided. LB 258 wisely addresses employers who would interfere with or retaliate against an employee for using sick leave.

³ Elise Gould and Jessica Schieder, “Work Sick or Lose Pay? The High Cost of Being Sick When You Don’t Get Paid Sick Days,” Economic Policy Institute, June 2017, <https://www.epi.org/publication/work-sick-or-lose-pay-the-high-cost-of-being-sick-when-you-dont-get-paid-sick-days/>.

⁴ Steven P. Shelov and Tanya Remer Altmann eds., *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5* (New York: Aspen Publishers, 2009).

⁵ “Missed School Days,” *The Health and Well-Being of Children: A Portrait of States and the Nation 2011-12*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal Child Health Bureau, 2014, <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/nsch/2011-12/health/more-information.html>.

⁶ Tom W. Smith and Jibum Kim, “Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences,” National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and the Public Welfare Foundation, June 2010, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/paid-sick-days-attitudes-and-experiences.pdf>.

⁷ Abay Asfaw, Regina Pana-Cryan, and Roger Rosa, “Paid Sick Leave and Nonfatal Occupational Injuries,” *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 9 (2012):e59-e64, doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2011.300482.

⁸ “Paid Sick Days: Low Cost, High Reward for Workers, Employers, and Communities,” National Partnership for Women & Families, January 2017, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/paid-sick-days-low-cost-high-reward.pdf>.

⁹ Supriya Kumar et al., “Policies to Reduce Influenza in the Workplace: Impact Assessments Using an Agent-Based Model,” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 8 (2013):1406-1411, doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2013.301269.

spread and allowing essential workers to safely and fully recover from the illness. Beyond the pandemic, basic paid sick leave is wise long-term policy for healthy workplaces, families, and communities.

Support healthy and financially secure families. Advance LB 258 out of committee to ensure Nebraskans have access to common-sense health leave, during a pandemic and for the future.

Sincerely,

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Nebraska Appleseed