

## City council must act on push for the right to paid sick days

BY ALBOR RUIZ  
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It is not enough, but it is certainly better than nothing.

More than 1 million workers citywide who don't have any paid sick days at work could soon enjoy the right to a modest number of them thanks to a bill reintroduced in the City Council last Thursday.

It should be approved ASAP.

The legislation, presented two days after [President Obama](#) signed health care reform into law, would give the 48% of working New Yorkers who now don't have any paid sick leave the right to up to five days a year if employed at small businesses and up to nine days a year at large firms.

Currently, an estimated 1.65 million workers in [New York](#) do not receive any paid sick leave, according to a study released by the [Community Service Society](#) and [A Better Balance](#). Low-income earners suffer the most: 66% cannot take a paid day off when they get sick. Nor can an astounding 72% of Latino low-wage workers.

"This would probably be the most important city law for immigrant workers and their families in a long time," said Ana María Archila, of Make the Road New York.

The bill is a new version of the Paid Sick Time Act that was introduced in the Council last year. The new legislation has been modified to accommodate some of the concerns of the business community.

The most notable change is a redefinition of small businesses from fewer than 10 employees to fewer than 20.

This means that the majority of the city's private employers would fall into the small businesses category and would only be required to provide up to five days of paid sick time per year.

"Delivering historic health reform is a victory for all New Yorkers. But until New Yorkers can take a day off when they are sick or need to care for their children - without having to miss a paycheck or worry about losing their job - we are not done. The time has come for paid sick days in [New York City](#)," said [Councilwoman Gale Brewer \(D-Manhattan\)](#), lead sponsor of the bill.

The urgently needed legislation also has 34 other Council sponsors and the backing of [Public Advocate Bill de Blasio](#), labor unions, small business owners and the [Working Families Party](#).

However, since [Council Speaker Christine Quinn](#) has not indicated her support for the bill, a date for a final vote on the bill is unclear.

The current situation, in which so many workers can't take time off to recover from illness or care for a sick child, represents a severe threat to public health.

The importance of this bill's passage into law is magnified by studies showing that a great number of these employees work in food service and 39% of them are public school parents.

"It's up to us to close this public health loophole and make sure that no New Yorker needs to choose between a paycheck and a doctor's visit," said [Manhattan](#) Borough President [Scott Stringer](#).

[Guillermo Barrero](#), a cook in a [Brooklyn](#) coffee shop who says he was fired after seven years on the job because he became ill and had to be rushed to the hospital, put it this way: "This is the 21st century, people should not be treated like this."

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