

TESTIMONY OF DESIREE ROSADO
Before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Subcommittee on Children and Families
“The Cost of Being Sick: H1N1 and Paid Sick Days”
November 10, 2009

Thank you, Senator Dodd and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, for holding this hearing on the cost of being sick. It is an issue that matters deeply to families like mine, in Connecticut and around the country. Thank you, also, for giving me the opportunity to testify here today.

My name is Desiree Rosado. I have been married for 13 years and have three children, ages 12, 10 and six. My oldest daughter, Isabella, is in 7th grade. My middle daughter, Alicia, is in 5th grade. My son, David, is in 2nd grade.

Like most, we are a working family. I have lived in Groton, Connecticut for 12 years, and have worked in the Groton Public School system for the last three years. My job is in special education, and I work as a one-on-one assistant in the school that Alicia and David attend.

My husband works as a security guard (3rd shift) supervisor at the Groton Naval Submarine base. He’s been working there for about five years.

We are members of a church called International Family Worship Center, where my husband and I head the Praise and Worship Department.

In our community, I couldn’t even tell you how many sick children have been sent home from school or kept at home due to illness these last several weeks. I think it’s fair to say that just about every family has either been affected by illness, or is worried that their children will be infected.

Mine were. All three of my children were sick this fall. They’ve been healthy for about a week-and-a-half now, but it was rough-going for a while.

First Alicia got a terrible headache followed by fever of about 102 that lasted for almost a week. She had stomach pain, dizziness and body aches. I had to miss work to stay home and take care of her.

The very day Alicia was able to go back to school, I went back to work. But I had been in class for about one hour when the school nurse called to tell me that David had a fever of 101. She said he had to go home.

Isabella fell ill that day as well, and she and her brother were both sick for about a week. Isabella developed a sinus infection and bronchitis as well as the flu.

So in all, I missed about two weeks of work to care for my kids.

I get no sick pay, so my paycheck for that period was almost nothing. That caused tremendous hardship for my family. My husband and I live paycheck-to-paycheck right now. We have no choice.

We are trying to pay down debts and make our family financially stable, but it's a hard road. And it's made immeasurably harder because whenever we get sick or our children get sick, we have to decide whether to stay home without pay, or to disregard doctor's orders and risk getting sicker and infecting others by going to work or school.

When I don't get paid, it wreaks havoc on our family budget. My husband handles the finances and is able to juggle things around so we can make ends meet, but sometimes we have to borrow from the rent money we've put aside. We hate to do that, but sometimes we have no choice.

That's one of the reasons I joined MomsRising, a wonderful million-member online organization that represents mothers like me across this country. MomsRising supports the Healthy Families Act, because families like mine need to be able to earn paid sick days – so we don't have to borrow from our rent money and go deeper into debt every time our kids get sick.

When I was asked if I would come here and share my story, and tell you how my family has been affected by this, I was more than willing because having no paid sick days has really hurt our family's finances and economic stability.

I am speaking not only for myself, but for many other moms and families who are dealing with the same thing right now – and who need relief.

Being able to earn paid sick days would help so many parents and families I know through my work, church, and community, and many more that I don't know personally but who struggle with these same issues.

I am honored to be here today, to take part in this hearing, and to have a chance to tell my story. I hope it will make a difference and convince you to pass the Healthy Families Act, so all workers will be able to earn paid sick days.

Thank you.