



## WHY ARE GROCERY AND RETAIL WORKERS IMPORTANT TO PUBLIC HEALTH?

In addition to the common colds and flus that are passed along when an ill cashier touches every item that goes into a customer's grocery bag, serious illnesses are spread as a result of people working while sick.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently found that sick food workers cause over half of norovirus outbreaks, and contributed to another 29% of outbreaks.<sup>3</sup>
- During the H1N1 Pandemic in 2009, sick workers may have caused as many as 7 million co-workers to get sick.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2011, 16% of documented foodborne illnesses in Washington were caused by ill food workers.<sup>5</sup>

## LACK OF PAID SICK LEAVE CAN HARM CHILD HEALTH

No caregiver should be forced to choose between caring for a sick child and going to work so they can pay the bills. However, without adequate paid sick leave, many families must decide between caring for a sick child at home and losing needed pay or risking their jobs.<sup>6</sup>

- One in five workers in our survey (20%) live with at least one child and do not have any other adults in their households.
- In Washington, the majority of preschoolers and school-age children live in homes where all parents are employed.<sup>7</sup>

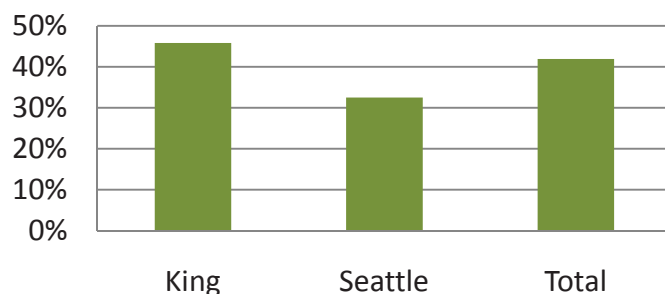
Adequate paid sick days mean fewer children going to school sick. When parents can stay at home with their kids, recovery times are shorter and germs stay home too—ensuring healthier schools, families and communities.<sup>8</sup>

## FEWER WORK SICK IN SEATTLE WHERE PAID SICK LEAVE IS REQUIRED BY LAW

Sage surveyed grocery and supercenter workers five to six months after the implementation of the Paid Sick and Safe Time Ordinance in Seattle. Although a recent survey of Seattle employers revealed incomplete compliance with the law,<sup>9</sup> our results indicate that fewer grocery and supercenter employees in Seattle are working while sick.

- One out of three Seattle respondents (33%) had gone to work sick.
- In contrast, 46% of non-Seattle respondents had gone to work sick.

More workers in King Co. have gone to work sick in the last year than in Seattle



- One Seattle worker shared: “I went to work sick before the sick leave law passed. Now we can call out the first day and still get paid. Everyone used to come to work sick because they couldn’t afford to lose a day’s pay.”

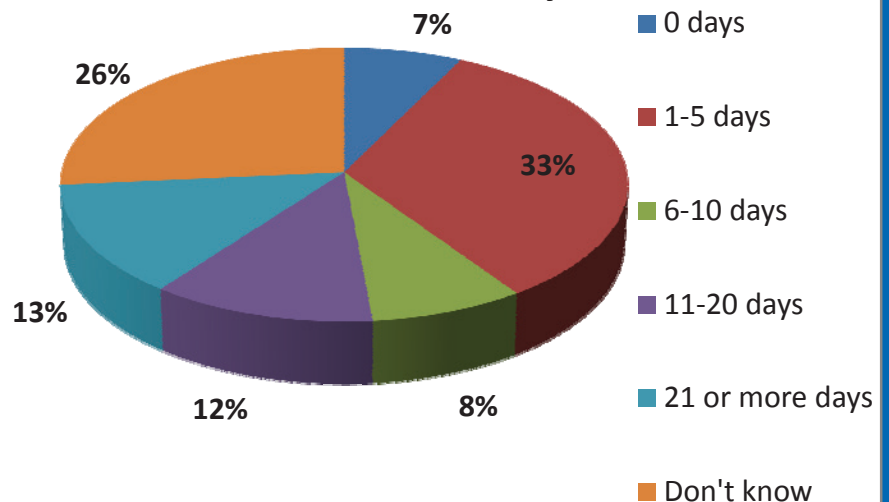
## PROFITABLE GROCERY GIANTS NOT OFFERING PAID TIME OFF TO WORKERS

Large grocery chains not only short workers paid sick leave, but any paid time off at all. All workers in the survey were employed by chain stores with more than 10 locations, or by stores with about 100 employees per store and a minimum of 4 locations.<sup>10</sup> These grocers comprise some of the largest retailers in the world, selling and earning billions of dollars each year, and compensating executive officers in the tens of millions of dollars. However, few of their frontline workers in the Seattle area receive adequate paid time off for any purpose.

- Only one in three workers surveyed (33%) received more than five days of paid time off.
- 40% received zero to five days of total paid time off per year: which includes vacation, sick days, holidays, etc.
- One out of four workers (26%) did not know how much paid time off they earn.

Recent developments in the Seattle area illustrate the extent to which some grocery chains consider paid sick time of marginal value for workers and the public. Safeway, Kroger and Albertsons are, as of this publication, bargaining with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 21, UFCW 367 and Teamsters 38, over wages and benefits for workers in the Puget Sound.<sup>11</sup> These chains have responded to the Seattle paid sick days law by proposing that workers opt out of their rights under the city ordinance as well as waive their rights from any future paid sick leave laws that may pass in Washington State.<sup>12</sup> But unionized grocery workers are bargaining hard to win a fair sick leave plan. And public opinion shows strong support for the concept of paid sick laws; nationwide 86% of voters think it is important that Congress and the president consider such laws at the federal level.<sup>13</sup>

### Forty Percent of Grocery Workers Get Fewer than 5 Paid Days Off\*



\*including vacation, sick and personal days, and holidays

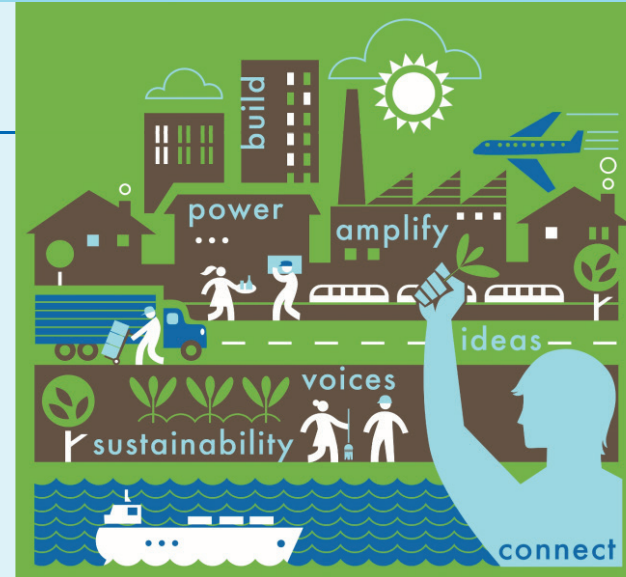
## Recommendations:

Adequate paid sick leave can help prevent the spread of disease and ensure that no-one has to choose between being a responsible member of society – as a parent, caretaker or front-line food-handler – and being a good employee. Workers should not have to face threats of lost income or lost jobs by staying home when sick.

As such, local and State legislators and public health officials should continue to explore requirements for businesses - where needed – to provide minimum paid sick days.

But major grocers should not wait for public officials to act. Grocery retailers across the region should voluntarily adopt employee policies that prioritize protecting public health. Specifically, grocery and retail employers should:

- Adopt company policies that offer adequate paid sick days to both full-time and part-time employees.
- Cease bargaining with grocery workers' unions to forgo their rights to paid sick leave granted by city and municipal laws.
- Comply with and support current and future city, county and state standards that guarantee workers access to paid time off when they are sick.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For more information about Puget Sound Sage's survey of mostly non-union workers in the grocery and supercenter industries in King County, contact the Sage offices at (206) 568.5000, 1032 S. Jackson Street, Suite 203, Seattle, WA 98104. [www.pugetsoundsage.org](http://www.pugetsoundsage.org)
- <sup>2</sup> The Food Chain Workers Alliance, 2012. "The Hands that Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities for Workers along the Food Chain." Available at: <http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf>, accessed May 20, 2013. The survey of over 150 grocery deli workers, conducted in 2010-2011, predates the City of Seattle's Paid Sick and Safe Time ordinance. It was conducted by the University of Washington Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 21 (UFCW 21). More information available by request from Sharon Maeda: [smaeda@ufcw21.org](mailto:smaeda@ufcw21.org).
- <sup>3</sup> Over 80% of these norovirus outbreaks involved food prepared in commercial settings, such as restaurants, delis or catering businesses. Hall, Aaron J., Valerie G. Eisenbart, Amy Lehman Etingüe, L. Hannah Gould, Ben A. Lopman, and Umesh D. Parashar. "Epidemiology of foodborne norovirus outbreaks, United States, 2001-2008," *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. (October 2012). Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid1810.120833>, accessed May 16, 2013.
- <sup>4</sup> Drago, Robert and Kevin Miller. "Sick at Work: Infected Employees in the Workplace during the H1N1 Pandemic," Institute for Women's Policy Research (January 2010). Available at: <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/sick-at-work-infected-employees-in-the-workplace-during-the-h1n1-pandemic>, accessed July 10, 2013.
- <sup>5</sup> Data as analyzed from the Washington Department of Health, Communicable Disease Report 2011. Available at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/5100/420-004-CDAnnualReport2011.pdf>, accessed June 30, 2013.
- <sup>6</sup> Seattle's paid sick and safe time ordinance provides up to 9 days per year for full-time workers who work at large businesses. The Bureau of Labor Statistics finds that nearly three-fourths (73%) of larger, private establishments offer paid sick leave, with an average of 8 days per year for newer workers in all private industry. See Van Giezen, Robert W. "Paid Leave in Private Industry over the Past 20 Years." *Beyond the Numbers: Pay & Benefits (August 2013)*. Available at: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-2/paid-leave-in-private-industry-over-the-past-20-years.htm>, accessed August 19, 2013.
- <sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey 1-year estimates as cited in Watkins, Marilyn. "Evaluating paid sick leave social, economic and health implications for Washington." *Economic Opportunity Institute (May 2013)*. Available at: [http://www.eoionline.org/work\\_and\\_family/reports/WA-PSD-May13.pdf](http://www.eoionline.org/work_and_family/reports/WA-PSD-May13.pdf), accessed May 30, 2013.
- <sup>8</sup> For more information on the effects of inadequate access to paid sick leave, see Marilyn Watkins, 2013, cited above.
- <sup>9</sup> Romich, Jennifer, Cori Mar and Chiho Song. "City of Seattle Paid Sick and Safe Time Ordinance Evaluation Project: Findings from the Initial Employer Survey." *University of Washington (June 2013)*. Available at: [http://www.thestranger.com/images/blogimages/2013/07/08/1373322983-sick\\_safeleavebaselinereport070213.pdf](http://www.thestranger.com/images/blogimages/2013/07/08/1373322983-sick_safeleavebaselinereport070213.pdf), accessed July 10, 2013.
- <sup>10</sup> Stores include: 99 Ranch, Cash and Carry, Costco, Grocery Outlet, Hmart, Safeway, Sam's Club, Target, Town & Country, Trader Joe's, Uwajimaya, Walmart, Whole Foods, and Winco.
- <sup>11</sup> Information about bargaining can be found on UFCW 21's website, [ufcw21.org](http://ufcw21.org), and on its Facebook page for bargaining, <https://www.facebook.com/2013GroceryBargainingUFCW21>. Posts on the latter, dated May 11, 2013, describe the employers' proposals regarding paid sick leave. See also <http://www.ufcw21.org/content/take-action-%E2%80%93-jump-start-negotiations> and <http://www.ufcw21.org/content/stand-together-%E2%80%94-fight-our-future>, accessed August 18, 2013.
- <sup>12</sup> As of August 2013, members of UFCW 21 are currently bargaining a contract with national chains (Safeway, Kroger and Albertsons) that will set standards for the majority of retail food workers in King County.
- <sup>13</sup> "New poll shows bipartisan voter mandate for family friendly workplace policies." *National Partnership for Women and Families (December 3, 2012)*. Available at: <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=36857>, accessed May 25, 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> Data provided by UFCW 21, which periodically obtains all wage data for its members. For direct comparability to the survey data, UFCW 21 calculated these numbers and included only union members who are at least 18 years old, work in King County, and had worked at least 3 months. Data is as of August 2013.



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