

Paid Sick Leave: Coming Soon To A City Near You?

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President Obama reincarnated paid sick leave as a possible federal law right in his recent State of the Union address. "Send me a bill that gives every worker in America the opportunity to earn seven days of paid sick leave," Obama said. "It's the right thing to do." Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, employees of covered employers currently have rights to as much as twelve weeks of unpaid medical leave per year. In addition, thousands of employers of every size voluntarily provide some form of paid sick leave in their employee benefits, such as a limited number of sick days or personal days. Three states (California, Connecticut and Massachusetts) presently mandate some form of paid sick leave for employees of private companies. Although the President's prospects for achieving a federal form of paid sick leave seem dim in the current Republican majority Congress, paid sick leave benefits are steadily rolling out at the municipal level. The growing roster of cities with paid sick leave ordinances now includes: New York City; San Francisco; Seattle and Tacoma, Washington; Portland and Eugene, Oregon; and eight municipalities in New Jersey. This is a recent trend. In 2014, two states (Massachusetts and California) and five cities adopted paid sick leave laws for the first time. While more state-level paid sick leave laws do not appear to be on the near horizon, the steady growth of municipal-level paid sick leave requirements for private employers may indicate an important trend. Local paid sick leave ordinances create serious complications for employers with widespread operations, resulting in a patchwork of employee benefits and medical leave issues on top of current FMLA compliance headaches.

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