

LaborFamilyNEWS

PARTNERING WITH UNIONS TO PUT FAMILIES *first*

FALL 2011

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Photo by Diane Greene Lent

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UNIONS WIN IT!

US Ikea Workers Unionize

In a victory for unions and the movement for family friendly workplaces, employees at a Danville, Virginia plant voted 221 – 69 to join the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) after complaining to management about long working hours and mandatory overtime. The factory is operated by a subsidiary called Swedwood and it makes low-cost bookcases and coffee tables for Ikea's US stores.

According to IAM staff Bill Street in a recent Bloomberg blog, mandatory overtime does not go over well in a rural, family-oriented small community. It also wouldn't go over well in Sweden where the company originated. The majority of Swedish workers are unionized, make high

MORE ON 2

PAID SICK DAYS CAMPAIGN

Recent Wins Build Momentum

BY JENYA CASSIDY

At a recent conference entitled **Take Back the American Dream**, Karen Nussbaum, Executive Director of Working America described paid sick time as a model economic security issue. "Among the thousands of people we talk to, paid sick time is an issue that immediately connects. It's about the top issue on every family's mind: keeping a job and a paycheck. It shows how ordinary working people are too often disempowered compared to corporations. And it's an issue that is the right size to tackle and win on." Across the country people from diverse backgrounds are building coalitions to win paid sick time in their cities and states.

In September, Seattle became the third city in the US to pass legislation mandating paid sick days. This summer, Connecticut passed legislation to become the first state to pass a paid sick days mandate and Philadelphia passed a similar ordinance that was later vetoed by the mayor. The Philadelphia Coalition for Healthy Families and Workplaces is not giving up and there are more than 20 active campaigns around the country fighting for the right to paid sick time on the job.

A COALITION EFFORT

Sarah Chernin, Political and Public Policy Director for United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 21 in Washington State says that working in coalition with other groups is vital to winning these basic rights for everyone. "Unions bring a lot to the table but we can't win alone – we need each other to be successful," she said. UFCW Local 21 committed resources and mobilized members in the crucial final push to pass Seattle's historic paid sick days law.

Marilyn Watkins, Policy Director of the Economic Opportunity Institute and co-chair of the Seattle Coalition for a Healthy Workforce, says the coalition's ability to bring diverse groups together was the key in building overwhelming public support and to eventually push the city council to a "yes" vote. "We were able to talk about paid sick days as both a workers'

rights issue and a public health issue," she said. "We had unions, restaurant workers, health care professionals, parents, employers and social justice activists all working together. And the public was on our side. The city council had to deal with us."

UNIONS ARE IN THE FIGHT

The majority of union members have paid sick days in their contracts. But lately management at large companies like Verizon have proposed rolling back existing paid sick days benefits. When 45,000 Verizon workers went out on picket lines this summer they were protesting the changes to paid sick days along with a long list of proposed takeaways. On the West

Coast, nurses went out on strike saying "no" to similar concessions. Rich Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO, joined National Nurses United on a hospital picket line saying, "I may not be a medical professional, but even I know that having sick nurses care for sick patients is sick."

Unions have a history of fighting to expand the rights of all workers. Kathy Black, Health and Safety Director of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), DC 47 in Philadelphia says it makes sense for unions to work on raising the floor for all workers: "There's no way there would be paid family leave in California, or even unpaid family leave anywhere in this country without the organized voice of unions. Unions fight for rights like that, even though many of their members have those benefits already. Right now, unions are in the forefront of fighting for paid sick days for all workers – a fundamental human right that's taken for granted in every other industrialized country in the world."

For more information on how unions and other organizations are working in coalition to win paid leave and paid sick days for all go to www.familyvaluesatwork.org



Union and community members of Seattle Coalition for a Healthy Workforce and Puget Sound Sage demonstrate before a city council vote on paid sick days.

Photo by Howard Greenwich, Puget Sound Sage

UNIONS WIN IT!

FROM PAGE 1

wages and have family-friendly workplaces. In the Danville plant, full-time workers were making \$8 an hour while their Swedish counterparts would make \$19 an hour and enjoy five weeks of government-mandated paid vacation.

According to IAM staff, union woodworkers in Europe and Asia put pressure on IKEA when they read about bad working conditions in the Virginia plant. Unions play a major role in making Sweden's workplaces family-friendly and now they will in Danville, Virginia too.

For more information, go to www.goiam.org

Have you bargained for flex time? Started an on-site child care? Labor Family News wants your story! Share your successes at info@working-families.org



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INSIDE STORY

BREASTFEEDING – MAKING IT WORK

Workplace lactation policies support nursing moms

BY VIBHUTI MEHRA

My son was born last year. Luckily, we had no trouble with the big latch-on. I savored every moment of bonding with him as he nursed. Three months after his birth, I returned to work. And then the trouble began. I grudgingly adopted my breast pump. But the little one didn't want anything to do with the bottles of "expressed" milk. Fearing a hunger strike, my husband, mother and father experimented with droppers and spoons – anything that would keep the boy nourished till mommy came home. Meanwhile, at work, I learned to accept my new mechanical relationship with tedious breast shields and a droning pump. Needless to say, breastfeeding was on my mind – all the time!

NURSING MOMS LACK SUPPORT

As a breastfeeding, working mother, I consider myself fortunate. I was able to take paid time off after my child was born and establish breastfeeding with him. I was blessed with the support of a family who helped me transition back to work after maternity leave. My workplace was more than accommodating. I was provided with a clean, private space as well as breaks to pump as many times as I needed to. And on days when my family had exhausted all options to feed the baby boy, my husband and father were able to bring my son to my workplace so that I could nurse him.

But when it comes to support for breastfeeding mothers, not all workplaces are created equal. Take the case of Heather Burgbacher from Colorado who was fired from her job at the

Rocky Mountain Academy of Evergreen because her supervisor refused to accommodate her need to pump breast milk at work.

Job performance was never an issue for Heather who had worked as a technology teacher at the school for almost five years. When she returned to work after her second child was born, Heather had to work out an arrangement with a co-worker so she could take a 20-minute break between her back-to-back classes and pump breast milk for her baby. After some months, Heather was asked by her supervisor to rearrange her pumping schedule. When she informed the supervisor that she could not physically do so, she was advised to consider switching her baby to formula. When Heather asserted her right to pump at work, she was informed that she was terminated, because of the "conflict" she had caused over her need to pump at work. Heather's case has been taken up by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Colorado and a lawsuit against Rocky Mountain Academy of Evergreen is imminent.

Heather's story is an example of how nursing mothers are being coerced to cut breastfeeding short or not start at all. But what is a breastfeeding mother to do when she is forced to return to work soon after childbirth because she lacks access to affordable maternity leave? And at work, nursing mothers like Heather are confronted with an environment that is either hostile or provides inadequate support to sustain breastfeeding.



The United States now has a national workplace standard to ensure nursing moms have the time and place to pump breast milk.

Paid Leave Now!

Working Mother and the National Partnership for Women & Families have launched a four-year campaign to ensure paid parental leave is available to all US workers by 2015. "This campaign is essential to the health of all working families," says Carol Evans, president of Working Mother Media. "It's also critical to the economic health of our companies and our nation. Our ability to compete in the global marketplace depends upon the energy, intelligence and commitment our mothers and fathers bring to the workplace every day - qualities that are built on a strong family foundation." To get involved, sign the online petition at facebook.com/working.mother

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE LEAVE

A new mother and her child need time to bond and establish breastfeeding. Research shows that breastfeeding rates increase when women have longer maternity leaves - and having access to paid leave helps. A recent study on California's Paid Family Leave program shows that use of the paid leave not only benefits a new mother's ability to start breastfeeding, but also doubled the duration of breastfeeding for nursing moms.

The United States lags far behind the rest of the world when it comes to family-friendly workplace policies such as paid maternity/parental leave. The good news is that unions, advocacy and community groups are coming together to build momentum for paid leave policies at the local, state and national levels.

WORKPLACE STANDARDS

Several states have passed legislation to support breastfeeding mothers including laws that allow women to breastfeed publicly, laws that relate to breastfeeding at work, laws that exempt breastfeeding mothers from



"In educating employers, we stress that they ask their breastfeeding employees about what kind of support they need and then work out an arrangement that is mutually beneficial."

– Genevieve Thomas Colvin

jury duty, and support for breastfeeding awareness-raising programs. The federal government also took a step in the right direction by including protections for breastfeeding mothers in the 2010 Affordable Care Act. The United States now has a national workplace standard to ensure nursing mothers have the time and place to pump breast milk.

A BUSINESS CASE FOR BREASTFEEDING

The new federal standard has opened up opportunities for breastfeeding advocates to educate employers about the case for lactation accommodation policies. "Lactation accommodation is not just the right thing to do – it's the law and it's good business," says Genevieve Thomas Colvin of the Breastfeeding Task Force of Greater Los Angeles. Genevieve coordinates the Task Force's Worksite Lactation Accommodation program.

Research shows that for every \$1 spent to support breastfeeding in the workplace, companies save \$3. Because breastfed infants are healthier, breastfeeding mothers miss work less often to care for a sick child. And companies that provide support for breastfeeding workers experience lower turnover rates and higher productivity and loyalty.

UNIONS CAN HELP

Through collective bargaining, unions can step up where government or employer policies are lacking – by negotiating contract language for longer and paid maternity leave, paid lactation accommodation breaks, education programs for employers and employees, and improved notification requirements for employers. Unions can also help with enforcement of existing laws.

"Labor unions are employers too. It is important that they also have their own policies and learn about lactation accommodation best practices to support their own staff," Genevieve points out.

Victoria Sawicki, a retired letter carrier and a National Vice President of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), views breastfeeding as a human rights issue. In her former role as Chief Shop Steward of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Golden Gate Branch 214, Victoria encountered many women letter carriers who wanted to but could not continue to breastfeed after returning to work from maternity leave. Victoria strongly advocated for labor's voice on this issue, leading to the passage of a resolution to support breastfeeding women workers by both her local union and the national CLUW.

"We need greater education of our union membership and leadership as well as the community at large on the long-term health benefits of breastfeeding. But we also need a social infrastructure that supports the rights of breastfeeding mothers – this includes negotiating more contract language and passing a nationwide paid maternity leave law," says Victoria. She also runs Breast Milk Action, a grassroots organization that brings unions and community groups together to advocate for the need to monitor pollutants that impact the quality of breast milk.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

As they say, it takes a village. And a breastfeeding mother needs the whole package - the place where she gives birth, her child care options, family/community support, and the workplace – all influence how the breastfeeding relationship is established and how long it lasts.

It is incumbent on our lawmakers, community and union leaders to sustain this nurturing relationship that promises a lifetime of benefits.

An abridged version of this story originally appeared on MomRising.org for their World Breastfeeding Week blog-a-thon.

GOODPOLICY

■ VIETNAM IS PLANNING TO EXTEND NATIONAL PAID MATERNITY

leave from the current four months to six months to ensure better health for infants by making it easier for mothers to exclusively breastfeed. Ha Dinh Bon, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Labor calls this move a positive step because "mothers are an important part of our workforce and children are the country's future." For more information go to: www.english.vietnam.net

■ THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION IS ENCOURAGING MORE WOMEN TO GET AND MAINTAIN

careers in engineering, science and math by creating more flexibility and job security for women researchers and scientists who have to take breaks for pregnancy leave or elder care. For more information go to: www.societyofwomenengineers.swe.org

GOODNEWS

■ A NEW LAW IN CALIFORNIA WILL PROTECT WOMEN WORKERS' HEALTH INSURANCE

while they are out on maternity leave. SB 299 covers a gap in current maternity leave law that left many pregnant workers and new mothers without health insurance when they needed it most. Equal Rights Advocates, and The California Commission on the Status of Women sponsored and advocated for this law with the California Work and Family Coalition. For more information go to www.workfamilyca.org

FASCINATINGFACTS

■ **ACCORDING TO THE WORLD BANK**, women are 40% of the world's workforce but hold just 1% of the world's wealth.

■ **MORE THAN ONE IN SIX AMERICANS** who work a full- or part-time job also report assisting with care for an elderly or disabled family member, relative, or friend. www.Gallup.com



Photo by Diane Green Lent

CWA and IBEW Strike Verizon

This summer, members of Communications Workers of America (CWA) and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) went on strike against Verizon over maintaining pensions, health care and paid sick days – key issues of economic security for their families. During the strike, Carol Joyner, National Policy Director of the Labor Project for Working Families, participated in solidarity actions and conducted a coalition building workshop for national CWA leaders in Chicago. Carol found that workshop participants agreed that "work family issues are union issues". For information on the continuing Verizon campaign, go to www.cwa-union.org



In this Issue:

Workplace Support for Breastfeeding Moms

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NETSYNOTE

I remember going back to work when my daughter was three months old and trying to continue to breastfeed. I did it for awhile and I'll spare you the details of trying to pump in the bathroom at District 65-UAW, my workplace in lower Manhattan. Let's just say it could be a pretty hilarious comedy routine.



We know that breastfeeding has enormous health benefits. And recent research on paid family leave (*Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California* - Ruth Milkman and Eileen Appelbaum) showed that use of California's paid family leave doubled the duration of breastfeeding.

A few years ago the New York City Health Department ran a campaign encouraging new moms, including working moms, to breastfeed. They learned that most women did not have a private office or time to pump. Where do you pump if you are a barista at Starbucks or a waitress in a busy restaurant? And if you are a nursing home attendant or a housecleaner in a hotel, you don't have time off to pump.

So we commend those lawmakers who included the breastfeeding accommodation provisions in the Affordable Care Act. It's a common sense provision that's good for the health of babies, mothers and the community.

On another note, by the time you read this, I will be in Washington, DC for three months on a practitioner's fellowship at the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University. This is a wonderful opportunity for me to study, read, research and interview others about a national paid family leave campaign. So more on that in the next newsletter!

Netty Freston

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