



Topic: The importance of paid sick leave

Speaker: Belinda Thielen, on behalf of Voces de la Frontera

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Many of the workers who are members of Voces de la Frontera are the people who have kept us fed and maintained the essential machinery of society throughout the pandemic. Not only have these workers done this at great risk to their own health and that of their families, but their risk has been treated with cold indifference. The lack of transparency about workplace exposures to COVID, inadequate protective equipment, and ineffective and unenforced safety measures have combined to make workplaces major sources of COVID exposure. Many workers simply cannot afford the lack of income that isolation or quarantine would entail. Workers who take the necessary time off from work risk disciplinary action or termination.

This is why Voces de la Frontera formed the Voces Essential Workers Rights Network in April 2020, to meet the urgent need of supporting and defending workers who were organizing and continue to organize for adequate protections during the pandemic. We have spoken with many workers who have worked while sick, or who have made the decision not to get tested for COVID because a positive test result would jeopardize their livelihood and their ability to support their families. We organized a Spanish-language 6-week workshop in the fall of 2020 to train undocumented workers in defending themselves, and had several victorious settlements with employers. But this is not enough – workers across the state of Wisconsin deserve adequate paid sick leave without having to fight for it.

The most basic protection – the ability to stay home without fear of reprisal or severe economic consequences – has been denied to many of these essential workers. Paid sick leave has always been an important health protection for workers. In the face of a pandemic, paid sick leave is a matter of life or death for workers, their families and our communities. We must ensure that all workers have the right to paid sick leave. For all these reasons, Voces de la Frontera

wholeheartedly welcomes and supports the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute's "Healthy Workers, Thriving Wisconsin" report. Thank you.