



**U.S. Department
of Transportation**



September 25, 2024

We write urging you to provide your employees what so many of us take for granted: paid sick leave.

Being able to stay home from work when illness strikes is common sense – a healthy and well-supported workforce is a safe workforce. Getting the necessary rest to recover helps ensure that workers can make safe and sound decisions while on the job. Taking off sick without penalty or loss of pay is also not a novel or extraordinary benefit. In fact, as of 2023, 80% of all workers in the U.S. economy have access to paid sick leave.

The Biden Administration has made it a priority to support rail labor's efforts to secure paid sick days for the more than 100,000 workers employed by the Class I freight railroads. In February 2023, the Administration called on your railroad and other freight railroads to take specific actions that increase accountability and improve safety. This includes providing your employees paid sick leave.

Today, 90 percent of Class I freight employees have paid sick days, up from approximately 5 percent at the end of 2022. That is significant improvement from where the industry started, and a demonstration of what can be achieved in a short timeframe when labor and management come together to do what is right for workers. We welcome these agreements reached by labor unions and railroads. While we applaud this success, it's cold comfort for the 10 percent of railroaders who still do not have paid sick leave.

Illness is not bound by railroad or craft. While three Class I freights currently provide all their employees paid sick leave, there are employees on your railroad who do not have this basic benefit. These workers are no more immune to illness than those who already have coverage. Not only do all employees deserve peace of mind knowing that they can take off sick to rest or help a family member recover from illness without being penalized; the public also deserves peace of mind knowing that healthy, focused railroad workers are on the job. In an industry where workers' constant attention is required to keep themselves and others safe, not providing workers sick days presents unnecessary risk that your company can fix.

The best deal is one the parties reach on their own. We encourage your railroad to engage and reach agreements with each of your unions and recognize the importance of making paid sick leave without penalty available to all employees. We encourage serious discussions, not those that include criteria you know will be rejected out of hand. We believe that the question for discussion is not what employees are willing to sacrifice to gain paid sick leave but what paid sick leave framework will offer the best outcome for workers and safe operation of the railroad.

As illness is not bound by any season, including national bargaining cycles, we encourage you to engage in these discussions today. This does not have to wait for national negotiations; your railroad should come to terms immediately with your labor unions. As our administration has noted, we are not satisfied with the current trajectory of railroad safety in America and see no reason for delay in making the rail industry safer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Pete Buttigieg".

Pete Buttigieg, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julie A. Su".

Julie A. Su, Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor