

Horses get plenty of sick days, so where's ours? City workers rally for more sick days

By Albor Ruiz
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Dozens of city workers rallied in [Central Park](#) yesterday, demanding the City Council answer a rather unusual question: "You gave horses five weeks of vacation - Why not give humans sick days?"

Why not, indeed?

The Council's concern for the well-being of the animals that work the city's ironic horse-drawn cabs is commendable. But paid sick days to human laborers is much more urgent.

Consider this: Even before passage of the new law mandating vacation for the 202 licensed carriage horses, the animals were already protected by [New York City](#) law from having to work when suffering "from a physical condition or illness making it unsuitable for work."

No such luck for some humans who are expected to keep trotting to work every day in sickness and in health.

That's why workers without paid sick days protested yesterday in front of carriage horses in Central Park and demanded Council members end their stalling by bringing to a vote Intro 97, the Paid Sick Time Act.

The event was organized by Make the Road New York, and co-sponsored by [A Better Balance](#), NYC Paid Sick Days Campaign, [NYS Paid Leave Coalition](#), ROC-NY and the [Working Families Party](#).

Several workers spoke about their experiences of having to work while sick for fear of being fired, or losing pay.

"The City Council needs to get its priorities straight - they've been busy standing up for hardworking horses while we wait for a vote in favor of hardworking humans," said Noé Chametla, of Make the Road New York, who works at a deli in [Astoria, Queens](#).

The legislation would give the 48% of working New Yorkers who now are without paid sick leave up to five days a year if employed at small businesses and up to nine days a year at large firms.

Not enough, but better than nothing.

The majority of the city's private employers would fall into the small-businesses category, defined as fewer than 20 workers. Recent data from the federal [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) showed that paid sick days cost only 8 cents an hour for workers in private service occupations like restaurants.

An estimated 1.65 million workers in the city do not receive any paid sick leave, according to a study released by the [Community Service Society](#) and A Better Balance. Low-income earners suffer the most: 66% cannot take a paid day off when they get sick. Nor can an astounding 72% of Latino low-wage workers, the reports found.

The Council paralysis is not due to lack of support.

While the Paid Sick Time Act has a veto-proof majority of 36 Council co-sponsors, plus backing from the public advocate, the carriage horse bill garnered only 10 Council co-sponsors when it passed in April. The Council held a second hearing on the paid sick-days bill in May, but has still not scheduled a vote.

The problem is that [Council Speaker Christine Quinn](#) hasn't had the horse sense to take a position on the bill, which makes it unclear when it will come to a vote.

But as [Councilman James Sanders](#), chairman of the [Council's Labor Committee](#) and one of the bill's sponsors said, "This legislation has been studied sufficiently - two hearings and three studies. Now it is time to land this plane."