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ATPE Urges Congress to Extend Federal COVID-19-Related Paid Sick Leave Benefits Into 2021

The conditions that necessitated paid sick leave extensions as part of COVID-19 relief continue to exist, even with potential vaccine arrival, says Texas' largest educator association

AUSTIN, Texas— As the U.S. Congress gets closer to passing a COVID-19 relief stimulus bill, the [Association of Texas Professional Educators](http://atpe.org) (ATPE)—the largest educator association in Texas—is thankful for the efforts to provide much-needed relief to individuals and families. Unfortunately, paid sick leave expansions are not currently part of the package being considered.

With COVID-19 cases continuing to surge across the United States, ATPE urges the U.S. Congress to extend current emergency paid leave provisions into 2021.

The paid leave benefits afforded by [the Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (FFCRA) Act of 2020 are set to expire Dec. 31, 2020. Passed in March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSLA) Act section of the FFCRA provides up to an additional 80 hours of paid sick leave to employees who are absent due to certain coronavirus-related reasons.

Once the EPSLA provisions expire at the end of this year, federal law will no longer guarantee that Texas public school employees receive paid sick leave if forced to isolate or quarantine. In the new year, many educators will lose their ability to work remotely as more campuses across Texas re-open. For those public school employees who might be concerned about catching the virus due to concerns for their own health or the health of their families, using their sick leave hours may be the only recourse left to protect themselves or their loved ones from potential infection.

“Although the COVID-19 vaccine is now becoming available to some Americans, it’s still unclear when most Texas school employees will actually be able to access it,” said ATPE Executive Director **Shannon Holmes**. “Health concerns and forced quarantines are likely to continue well into the new year. Educators need all the protections that they can get.”

In Texas, 1.51 million cases have been reported since the pandemic began, and more cases are reported daily. On Dec. 15 alone, there were 19,502 new cases reported. School districts across Texas understand the importance of the extensions. A couple of school districts this week even voted to pay for the continuation of the sick leave benefits out of their own budgets.

“With cases at an all-time high not only in Texas but nationally, we hope that Congress will see how important it is that these extensions and protections remain,” added Holmes. “It is unfair to force already over-burdened school districts to decide whether to keep funding these extra paid sick leave hours out of their own limited budgets.”

As the conditions that first necessitated the paid sick leave additions are not only still present but also worsening, ATPE believes Congress must include this important relief in any new COVID-19 aid packages.

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In March 2020, ATPE created the first COVID-19 resource page dedicated solely to providing information to Texas educators and public school stakeholders. The [ATPE.org/Coronavirus](https://www.atpe.org/coronavirus) page contains an in-depth FAQ for educators, relevant news updates from across Texas, and other resources for Texas educators, parents, and school employees. Learn more at www.atpe.org/coronavirus.

About the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)

Founded in 1980, ATPE is the leading educators' association in Texas with approximately 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, and future, retired, and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for Texas' five million public school students. | [atpe.org](https://www.atpe.org)

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