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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AS COVID SPIKES, INVESTORS PRESS FOR PAID SICK LEAVE FOR FRONTLINE RETAIL AND FOOD WORKERS

Shareholder proposals at seven companies request a report on the feasibility of including paid sick leave as a standard employee benefit beyond COVID-19.

NEW YORK NY, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17TH, 2020 – As COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to spike during the holidays, today investors announced they had filed [proposals](#) for 2021 proxies with major U.S. employers seeking to learn how the companies might adopt paid sick leave (PSL) policies as a standard health and safety protection for their workers.

Companies receiving proposals are **CVS** (\$CVS), **Dollar General** (\$DG), **Kohl's** (\$KSS), **Kroger** (\$KR), **McDonald's** (\$MCD), **Walmart** (\$WMT) and **Yum! Brands** (\$YUM).

The investors say significant exposure to the public puts employees of these companies at heightened risk of contracting illness, notably the COVID-19 virus. They argue that by adopting permanent paid leave policies, the companies will help mitigate the risk of outbreaks and closures by allowing employees to safely quarantine and recover at home.

According to the Department of Labor, four out of ten hourly workers don't have access to paid sick leave. Without this guarantee, many employees are faced with the choice of either going to work sick and infecting others, or losing a day's wages, further exacerbating the financial pain employees and their families are already experiencing as a result of the pandemic. Workers without PSL also face the risk of retaliation from supervisors, or being fired for calling out sick.

As the pandemic began unfolding in March, investors issued a statement with the support of 335 institutional investors representing \$US9.5t outlining a [5-point plan](#) for businesses to protect workers amid the crisis: paid sick leave was the first of the five principles.

"Companies are quick to say their workforces are their most valuable assets but it's tough to believe when they lack such basic protections as paid sick leave," said Corey Klemmer of Domini Impact Investments. ***"Strong and strategic workforce management certainly yields long-term benefits like***

employee loyalty and productivity, but beyond, that PSL is an essential risk management tool during a global pandemic.”

In response to the pandemic, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) required that certain employers provide paid time off for workers ill with COVID-19 or quarantined due to exposure to the virus, but that law is set to expire at the end of 2020.

“As a mom to 2 kids, paid sick leave would be a lifeline,” said Valerie Thompson of Mayfield, KY, who has worked as a Walmart Associate for 27 years. ***“Even after nearly three decades of loyal service, I struggle to survive on less than \$12/hour and walk a tight rope balancing the risk of losing a paycheck with the risk of exposing my family to this deadly virus. A sane and humane paid sick leave policy would mean that at least I can care for my family when they need me without fearing that I’ll lose my job and worrying about how to put food on the table. Walmart shareholders now have the opportunity to protect workers and their families by addressing the serious gaps in existing paid leave policies — something company executives have failed at repeatedly.”***

According to [studies](#) by the Center for American Progress: *In 2019, more than 32 million people in the country did not have access to a single paid sick day, and 4 out of 5 workers did not have access to paid family leave. Low-wage workers and workers of color are less likely than higher-wage and white workers to have access to paid leave. This gap is particularly dangerous and harmful for people of color and women, who are disproportionately represented in front-line industries where they face higher risks of exposure to the coronavirus.*

“Companies should recognize that providing paid sick leave as a standard benefit is not an act of benevolence but of corporate self-interest,” said Rosanna Landis Weaver of As You Sow. ***“It demonstrates a commitment to safeguard the health and welfare of both workers and customers, two invaluable stakeholder groups.”***

“Paid sick leave is an economical way to attract and maintain a motivated workforce that is essential to future growth and long-term sustainability. As long as the fast food and retail sectors fail to provide their front-line workers, who largely come from Black and other marginalized communities, with better pay and essential benefits such as paid sick leave, investors will have no choice but to question the viability and future growth of companies in these sectors,” said Dieter Waizenegger, of CtW Investment Group. ***“The Movement for Black Lives and the devastating impact of the global pandemic have laid bare that companies in these front-line sectors will need to improve their treatment of workers in order to remain competitive and avoid significant reputational risk.”***

About the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR)

Celebrating its 49th year, ICCR is the pioneer coalition of shareholder advocates who view the management of their investments as a catalyst for social change. Its 300-member organizations comprise faith communities, socially responsible asset managers, unions, pensions, NGOs and other socially responsible investors with combined assets of over US\$2 trillion. ICCR members engage hundreds of corporations annually in an effort to foster greater corporate accountability. Visit our website www.iccr.org and follow us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

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