

San Antonio's Sick and Safe Leave Ordinance
Colleen M. Bridger, MPH, PhD, Assistant City Manager
City of San Antonio
Jennifer N. Herriott, MPH, Interim Director of Health
San Antonio Metropolitan Health District

The United States is the only developed country in the world that does not guarantee paid sick leave to its workers. On August 16, 2019, the United States' seventh largest city--San Antonio, Texas--joined a small but visionary group of local and state governments that require businesses to offer paid sick leave to their employees.

Known as the Sick and Safe Leave Ordinance, San Antonio's new law gives employees the right to take up to 56 hours of paid time off for illness, injury, and preventive medical and mental health care. This ordinance also allows employees to use paid leave to seek help for domestic abuse, stalking, or sexual assault, or help loved ones access health, mental health, or family violence services.

The San Antonio City charter allows citizens to initiate petitions for virtually any city-wide ordinance. For petitions to be valid, gathered signatures must be greater than 10 percent of the registered voters at the time of the last city election. The original ordinance was submitted to the San Antonio City Council via a petition that garnered 144,000 signatures from citizens in May 2018; twice what was needed. Texas Organizing Project and MOVE Texas were the chief organizations that canvassed San Antonio neighborhoods to gather these signatures of support.

This session will guide attendees through San Antonio's experience crafting a paid sick leave law in a political climate where universal health coverage is controversial. The workshop will begin with a look at the Sick and Safe Leave Ordinance's beginnings, followed by its reception in city government and the community, legal challenges from business groups and the creation of a commission to address businesses' concerns. The session will conclude with a look at how the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District is preparing for the Sick and Safe Leave's December 1st implementation date.