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Queens small business owners support paid sick days

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A group of local small business owners, City Council members and community leaders stood together Tuesday, March 13, to announce their support for paid sick days at Terraza 7 Live Music, a restaurant and music venue in Jackson Heights, Queens.

The group launched a "Conscious Consumer Initiative" to highlight and promote local businesses that already provide paid sick days.

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Courtesy of Make The Road New York

City Council Members, small business owners and coalition members rallied in support of paid sick days and launched their Conscious Consumer, Conscious Business initiative at a local business in Elmhurst. Courtesy of Make The Road New York.

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Supporters are calling on City Council to pass the Paid Sick Time bill, which would ensure that 1.5 million New Yorkers without access to paid sick days are able to take time off when they or their families are ill. In addition to the support of small businesses, the bill has 35 Council sponsors and is supported by a diverse coalition of labor unions, women's rights organizations, healthcare providers and community organizations.

"I know how important it is to take time off when you are sick to prevent disease from spreading," said Freddy Castiblanco, owner of Terraza 7 Live Music, who was trained as a physician in his native Colombia before immigrating to

Queens. "As a business owner I believe giving paid sick days is not only the right thing to do, it also builds a stronger business."

Leni Juca, owner of the Oxium Copy Shop in Jackson Heights, which provides paid sick days, left his job at a large chain to start his own business. "I left corporate America to start a small business because I wanted to be treated like a full human being, not a number," said Juca. "In my business I treat my employees like family. Everyone gets sick, and that's why I provide paid sick days. People come back to work more committed because they know I'm there for them."

Juca and Castiblanco are both members of Small Business United. They joined with Make the Road NY, which has over 4,000 Queens members, to announce the creation of a "Conscious Consumer Card" and a grassroots mobilization and education campaign to highlight and promote responsible businesses in the community such as Terraza 7 and Oxium that provide paid sick days to their employees.

Council Member Julissa Ferreras, representing Jackson Heights, Corona, Elmhurst and East Elmhurst, is a sponsor of a proposal in the New York City Council to guarantee paid sick days, joined the rally to announce her support for the initiative.

"Make the Road's Conscious Consumer initiative is a great way to let the community know which businesses offer paid sick days to their workers," said Council Member Ferreras. "Paid sick time is a small measure that can have an immediate, positive impact on business productivity, reduce unemployment, and strengthen financial security for families who desperately need relief."

"I'm proud to stand with small businesses that support their communities and their workers by providing paid sick days," said Wilfredo Larancuent, a leader in Workers United and in the Working Families Party. "All working New Yorkers should support the businesses that support our communities."

"I have suffered as a result of not having paid sick days. Thousands of other workers in Jackson Heights and Corona have as well," said Rocio Loyola, a Make the Road member and Jackson Heights resident. "Today we're coming together to show the economic power we have as a community. We're here to educate consumers to support businesses that provide paid sick days with their dollars. That's what this is all about."

Other Council Members also expressed their support for the small business led "Conscious Consumer Initiative," including Gale Brewer the lead sponsor of the paid sick days bill, Margaret Chin, Annabel Palma and James Sanders Jr.

The NYC Paid Sick Days Campaign is a coalition of low wage workers, women's rights advocates, healthcare providers, small business owners, labor unions and community organizations who believe New York cannot afford to wait for paid sick days.

Paid sick days is a commonsense policy for our city and our economy that protects family economy security and public health.

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