1. Title
Effect of a federal paid sick leave mandate on physical mobility

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3. Abstract
Physical distancing is a vital non-pharmaceutical strategy to overcome the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health threat. The inability to take paid leave from work that cannot be conducted remotely is a crucial barrier to individuals being able self-quarantining when they acquire an infectious disease, however we do not know yet how effectively public policy that increases paid sick leave has increased employees’ ability to self-quarantine. Healthcare professionals strongly recommend that sick employees remain at home while they recover, as a front line public health response to curbing the spread of infections. The United States has no permanent national paid sick leave policy. Further, the majority of U.S. employment cannot transition online. For example, in recent study, Dingel and Neiman (2020) show that only 37% of jobs in the U.S. can be completed at home. Nearly a quarter of U.S. employees to not have access to any paid sick leave (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). Many sick employees work while suffering from infectious diseases, impeding their own recovery and potentially infecting co-workers, clients, and so forth. Working while sick is common in the U.S.: 90% of employees report coming to work while sick (Accountemps 2019). The lack of federal paid sick leave legislation arguably leaves the U.S. vulnerable to crises such as the covid-19 pandemic. In this project, we assess how much recent paid sick leave policy enacted in response to covid-19 has increased ability of individuals to remain in their residences. Given the lack of a national sick-leave policy, numerous states and localities have adopted paid sick leave mandates (PSLM), beginning with San Francisco in 2007. These mandates compel most private employers to provide up to seven days per year of paid leave. Prior research shows that adoption of a PSLM increase access to paid sick leave by 20% and increases use of paid sick leave by two days per year among employees who gain access to the benefit following PSLM adoption (Maclean, Pichler, and Ziebarth 2020). PSLMs therefore appear to offer financial protection needed to enable sick employees to stay away from workplaces while they recover from an infectious disease and thereby promote recommended self-quarantining. However, the effects of federal policy have not been evaluated.

The covid-19 pandemic, which emerged in the U.S. in February through April of 2020, has highlighted the importance of paid sick leave as a vital public health tool (Cain Miller 2020). Indeed, in response to the massive surge in covid-19 infections (over 550,000 cases and nearly 22,000 deaths at the time of writing), the federal government adopted a temporary national paid sick leave policy through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). This Act, which became effective April 1st, 2020 and will sunset December 31st, 2020, compels many private and public employers to offer up to two weeks of temporary emergency sick leave to employees for covid-19-related treatment, isolation, or childcare. A central objective of the Act is to prevent further spread of the virus.
In this project, we propose to study the impact of FFCRA on ‘staying-home’ — a proxy for self-quarantining behaviors, measured using rich data available from GPS tracking of cellphones in each U.S. county. In particular, we will estimate the effect of PSMLs using differences-in-differences methods. We will leverage variation in mobility across U.S. counties prior to FFCRA to identify policy effects following previous economic research that studies the impact of policies that — like FFCRA — impact the nation a whole (Finkelstein 2007, Alpert, Powell, and Pacula 2018, Courtemanche et al. 2017). Our findings will offer real-time information on the role of paid sick leave in enabling employees to stay home and self-quarantine, as recommended socially important public health behaviors in the U.S.

4. Data description
We will use GPS location data which measures by day, the degree to which individuals in a region (as small as the census block group level) leave their house, and when they leave, can proxy whether they go to work or non-work locations. These data are provided free to researchers by SafeGraph Inc, and have already been obtained by data use agreement, and cover the period February 25th, 2020 through April 2020 (ongoing and updated daily). In our analysis, we will aggregate these data to the census block group-level by day, measuring the degree to which individuals engaged in work-like behavior on that day. These data, which are updated with a three day lag, allow us to accurately locate individual devices and track the share of devices that leave the home area in real-time as PSLMs are enacted, and are therefore ideal for our study.

5. JEL codes for the project
H12, I12, I18, J32

6. Key-words
Coronavirus; covid-19; paid sick leave; social distancing; pandemic disease

References: