



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1054

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Committees on:  
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Labor and Workforce Development

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Honorable Cheryl A. Coakley-Rivera  
Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development  
Room 39, State House  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Coakley-Rivera,

I am writing in regard to the bill heard Thursday by the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.

Please note my support and request that our committee advance the following legislation:

S.930/H.1398, An Act establishing paid sick days

In response to testimony heard by our committee on behalf of paid sick leave, it is my conclusion that now is the right time to advance real economic security for the nearly 1.4 million employees who still lack the basic employment and economic security universal access would provide. The opportunity to earn paid sick leave is a fair and prudent policy that would benefit working households, public health and the bottom line of all employers.

Even with near universal health insurance coverage, many households remain one illness away from financial ruin. Employees continue to experience unease and hardship lingering from the Great Recession and the weak economic recovery. Many employers weathered the recession, due in part, to gains in productivity. With the threat of layoffs, pressure to work harder and with greater efficiency, simply to maintain employment is the reality that most employees face in a vulnerable economy, however, over forty-percent of these workers also experience the additional pressure brought on by the lack of access to paid sick leave. The Legislature has the power to reduce this pressure.

Even with millions of dollars directed at preparedness for pandemic illness, these efforts and resources to prevent the spread of influenza and other communicable illnesses continue to be hampered by the reality

that forty-percent of employed adults have no choice but to report to work even when sick. The economic and public health benefits of empowering sick employees to recover from illness at home is difficult to quantify, however, the idea that wage protection for employees experiencing communicable illness will also provide productivity protection for employers is clear.

The problems resulting from the lack of a common policy also extends to our schools and communities, where sick children, whose parents lack paid sick leave, are often sent to school, rather than remaining at home under the care of a family member. At school, a sick child will spread illness to classmates and to school staff. One of the basic recommendations included in literature provided by the Department of Public Health, encourages readers that "if you are sick, stay home." In addition, the literature explains that adults can spread the flu for about five days, and kids can spread it for seven days. We cannot effectively deploy a strategy of encouraging people infected with seasonal flu to remain at home, especially in the face of such strong economic and job security pressure.

Drawing upon my own experience as a small business owner and a leader in the human resources division of a large corporation, I would add that the provision of paid sick leave is a best practice that does increase productivity, foster loyalty and improve wellness. The vast majority of business leaders understand that such policies are profitable for employers, households and the community. It is difficult for people with relatively higher incomes today to imagine working without this protection, as low-wage workers, some of the most vulnerable and in need of such economic security are those most apt to lack paid sick leave.

We must also consider the question of fairness for all employers. The lack of a common policy on paid sick leave means that employers with adequate policies shoulder a disproportionate responsibility compared to employers who lack such policy. Almost identical to the notion that all employers must reasonably contribute to the provision of quality affordable health insurance, the same should also be true of paid sick leave. While the economic benefit of sick individuals choosing to recover at home is an outcome shared by all employers across the Commonwealth, the economic cost is not. We find ourselves with another manifestation of the "free rider" dilemma, like that of health insurance, in which employers who do that right thing bear the cost, while those who do not may still share in the benefits. With the legislation before our committee, we have the power to address this imbalance.

Now is the time to provide universal access to paid sick leave for employees in the Commonwealth. This issue remains as many suggest the missing piece of health care reform. It is an issue of economic justice, of social justice, and our delay threatens the economic security of many and the public health enjoyed by all. Respectfully, I request that our committee move to advance the aforementioned bills. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office.

Respectfully,



**DENISE ANDREWS**

*State Representative*

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