

The Labor and Public Employees Committee
Public Hearing - **Tuesday, February 24, 2009 3: 00 P. M.**
Room 2B – Legislative Office Building

Testimony In Support of H. B. No. 6187 (RAISED) AA Mandating Employers Provided Paid Sick Leave to Employees - To require employers with fifty or more employees provide six paid sick days to their employees for use for the employee's sickness, the employee's child's sickness, or to deal with sexual assault or family violence issues.

Good Afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and Committee Members. My name is Deborah B. Noble and I am a member of the Working Families Party Statewide Board, as well the co-chair of the 5th Congressional District Chapter. I am here today to speak in support of **H. B. No. 6187 (RAISED) AA Mandating Employers Provided Paid Sick Leave to Employees** .

Both this week and last week, like many other weeks this past winter, I have gone to work sick. For almost a week now, I have had a sore throat, a dry cough, congested sinuses and I am thoroughly exhausted. My health plan consists of a box of tissue, lip balm, cough drops, tea and being thoroughly dosed up with over the counter medication. What I really need is all that plus bed rest. I do not want to be at my job infecting my co-workers, though they are a relatively understanding bunch. If you have to ask why I went to work sick, then you must have paid sick days. I do not. Nor do I have health insurance. A double whammy if ever there was one.

A little background: I work for a legal placement agency at a large international insurance company. I am a contracted employee, also known as a "Temp". There are over 70 staff members in my department alone. None of us has paid sick days and many do not have access to affordable health care. Both of these companies, the placement agency and the insurance company, have the capacity to offer health benefits or, at the very least, paid sick days. I have looked for better employment, every day for almost a year now, but what's available either doesn't pay enough or simply doesn't exist. I am not alone where I work (over 70 people in the same boat, no wonder I'm sick again), nor in the State of Connecticut or should I say Connecti-cough....?

Nearly 40% of Connecticut employees do not have paid sick days. For food service workers this number almost doubles to 78%. Most Connecticut residents, if asked, believe that requiring employees to work when they are sick is not only unfair for the employee, but it is also unhealthy for the workplace. When restaurant employees and healthcare workers have to go to work sick they are likely to spread illnesses to their co-workers and the public. Be assured, this poor policy not only affects service industry employees, but white-collar professionals as well. Studies show that 18% of office workers will catch the flu or another virus from an ill co-worker.

I have repeatedly heard from business-related organizations (i.e. CBIA) saying that this mandate will be costly and hurt businesses in Connecticut, but they have yet to show how this will occur - if at all. I believe and studies show that providing paid sick days actually help businesses and it is not a costly mandate. What is costly are the days when someone has to go to work sick in order to make ends meet; or because they fear they will lose their job if they don't and then they pass their illness onto their co-workers. Productivity and profitability go down and companies, no matter what sort of business, lose money. For example, my daughter works as a manager at a large department store in West Hartford and 3 of her staff were out sick last week because one person initially came to work with a cold. Now the store is short staffed for a week instead of losing just one employee for 1-2 days. As someone who is personally affected by a lack of paid sick days, I believe that no one should be forced to go to work sick in order to meet basic economic necessities and risk infecting their co-workers or the public. In addition, parents should not be forced to send an ill child to daycare or school simply because they can't risk losing a day's pay. It's immoral and bad business.

If you live in Connecticut you may have seen the television advertisement featuring Gov. M. Jodi Rell asking workers to stay home when they are ill. This commercial is both insulting to workers like myself and contradictory to the current policies in CT. Providing paid sick days so that ill workers can afford to stay and get better while healthy workers stay healthy, needs to be the focus of this committee; especially in light of the fact that many workers who do not have paid sick days also do not have access to affordable health care. Giving workers paid sick time is not only the right thing to do, it also just good common sense. Everyone gets sick. Everyone should have the time to heal.

One more thought: My department at the insurance company consists of eleven contract employees. At the moment 4 of us are sick. That's over 1/3 of the department. Our supervisor, a permanent staff person, has what appears to be an air purifier and anti-bacterial gel on her desk. I think it's because she knows that her staff is a bunch of typhoid time bombs waiting to explode.

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