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Art Perry
Political Director
32BJ Service Employees International Union
Tuesday, February 24, 2009

Testimony in support of R.B. No. 6187

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Prague, Chairman Ryan and Members of the Labor Committee, and thank you for your continued attention to working families' need for paid sick days.

My name is Art Perry, and I am the Connecticut Political Director for 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union. We represent 4,500 hard-working commercial cleaners, property service and food service workers across Connecticut.

We've all been here before to talk about the need for paid sick days, but this year, amidst the economic downturn, the need is more pronounced than ever before.

And let's be clear about what we're talking about here in Connecticut. We live in one of the country's wealthiest states with some of the most egregious urban poverty rates. One-third of Hartford residents and nearly half of the city's children are living in poverty. And it's not much better in Bridgeport and New Haven, where around 20 percent of the city is living in poverty.

Many working families did not prosper in the good times, and we cannot turn a blind-eye while Connecticut's families fall deeper into economic despair. Despite their hard work, people have been struggling to raise their families on low-wages and without basic benefits like paid sick days.

Low-wage workers, who have been living paycheck to paycheck for years, are seeing their hours cut back and their side jobs disappear. But when they, or their children, bring the flu home from school, they are financially unable to take an unpaid day off of work. The cost of losing their jobs is too high, and their budgets are already stretched to far too pay the bills with a day's less work.

Paid sick days are not a costly benefit, and reports from San Francisco, where paid sick days have been in effect for two years, show there have not been an adverse affect on businesses.

Mandating paid sick days is good for working families, good for public health and good for business. Let's make 2009 the year we stand up for what's good for our community and make the paid sick days bill a law.