

Dr. Phil Brewer

Testimony to the Labor Committee IN SUPPORT of SB 63

Dear Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and the members of the Labor Committee:

I'm Dr. Phil Brewer. I have practiced emergency medicine in Connecticut for twenty-two years and I am currently the University Medical Director for Student Health at Quinnipiac University as well as an attending physician and clinical instructor at Hartford Hospital. I am speaking on my own behalf, however. I am in favor of a law requiring paid sick leave for three reasons: It's an important public health measure, it meets the needs of working people, and it is good for business.

Every day people with communicable diseases go to work sick because they can't afford not to. These people serve us in restaurants, take care of our children in day care centers, handle our purchases in retail outlets, and come into contact with the public in many other ways. As we saw with the H1N1 outbreak, certain illnesses are very contagious and one well-placed person can infect many others. But as we also saw, when a person is not protected by paid sick leave, the public is not protected from his or her illness. We cannot completely eliminate this problem, but we can greatly reduce it, and that is the realistic goal of all public health measures.

Another way in which the public benefits when workers have paid sick time is that they have the ability to seek medical care in their doctor's office rather than going sick to the emergency department after the end of the work day. The Emergency Department is the best place to be for some conditions. For others, not so great. Again using the example of the H1N1 outbreak last fall, most of the people who could not stay home from work for lack of sick pay, but who felt sick enough to seek medical care in emergency departments, were forced to struggle through a full day and then go spend several hours in a crowded emergency department.

How much better it would be for everyone if they could recuperate at home and perhaps not need to see a physician, or at least have time in the middle of the day to go see their family doctor. Instead they exposed their coworkers, the public, and staff and other patients in the ER to their illness. And aside from epidemics like H1N1 flu, it just makes sense to be able to have a paid sick day and get a small problem treated before it becomes a big one.

Finally, such a law is good for business. When everyone is required to do this then businesses are competing on a level playing field. They also benefit from a healthier, more productive workforce. It's really a win-win idea.