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Testimony of Rep. Roland Lemar (D-96) in favor of RB 913, AN ACT MANDATING EMPLOYERS PROVIDE PAID SICK LEAVE TO EMPLOYEES.

Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee

March 1, 2011

Dear Chairwoman, Sen. Prague, Chairman Rep. Zalaski -, and distinguished Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee

My name is Roland Lemar and I am a State Representative from the 96th Assembly District which encompasses Hamden and New Haven.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the important question of how a paid sick days policy would impact employers, workers, families, and the general public here in Connecticut.

Everyone gets sick. Not everyone has time to get better. As many of you are aware, an estimated 600,000 workers in Connecticut lack paid sick days. Some of the largest groups of workers without paid sick days include workers in food service, retail and healthcare. 78% of workers in food services and accommodations lack paid sick days. When those workers come to work sick, they risk spreading illness to their coworkers and to the general public.

Families depend on their jobs to survive and our communities depend on their continued employment in order to thrive. But when workers don't have access to paid sick days, staying home to recover from illness or to care for a sick loved one means losing a paycheck and possibly a job. A stable and strong economy depends on an economically secure, healthy and productive work force—all of which cannot be achieved while so many of our workers have no paid sick leave available to them.

This must change - Too many hard working residents of New Haven and Hamden, the communities I represent, do not have paid sick days and losing their wages or job is as easy as

catching a cold or having to take your child to the doctor. This is not good for our communities, it's not good for our local economy -it's not healthy, and it's not right.

Especially in a tough economy, no one should have to choose between their job and their family's health. For people who have paid sick days, they are easy to take for granted — until your waiter, your child's school bus driver or day care provider comes to work sick. Allowing workers to earn paid sick days is critical to family's economic security and to public health.

New research adds to the considerable evidence showing paid sick leave legislation would not harm businesses in Connecticut. This February, a study of San Francisco employers by the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that a majority (two-thirds) of employers there support the law four years after it was implemented. Support was equally strong among small businesses.

This new research sheds new light on what impact a similar bill would have in Connecticut. When the vast majority of businesses in San Francisco say that the paid sick days has not hurt their bottom line, it is time for our opponents to take back their claims that it would kill small businesses in Connecticut. The evidence is decidedly against their stance.

The study found that most workers don't even use all of their allotted sick leave. The median number of paid sick days used by San Francisco employees was three. One quarter of all workers did not use a single paid sick day. This suggests that previous cost estimates, which assumed workers would use all of their available days, are way higher than they would actually be.

Other findings from the survey, which polled 718 businesses and 1,200 workers in San Francisco: Six out of seven businesses did not report any negative effect on their profitability because of paid sick leave.

- Two-thirds of small businesses (1 to 9 employees) support paid sick leave.
- Seventy-one percent of small business did not report any negative effect on their profitability (14 percent said "Don't Know").
- Only four percent of small businesses reported that the new law worsened the predictability of employee absences, indicating that absenteeism is not an issue.

Again, everyone gets sick. But everyone can gain when families are provided the supports they need to care for themselves and for sick children and family members.

As a Representative of the families and businesses that make up the wonderful communities of Hamden and New Haven, I'm asking you again to maintain the leadership that you have shown on this issue, to make a strong recommendation to the General Assembly and the entire State of Connecticut that we support our families, that we support our local economy AND that we support paid sick days for ALL our residents. And I'm asking you to take this a step further – to go beyond the current 50 employee minimum articulated in the bill, and find ways to protect all of our neighbors by ensuring every worker has access to paid sick days.