

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 913:

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An Act mandating employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Their Employees

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Labor Committee Members:

It is an honor to offer written testimony in support of Raised Senate Bill 913, AN ACT MANDATING EMPLOYERS PROVIDE PAID SICK LEAVE TO EMPLOYEES. I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek. I am a resident of Glastonbury. I serve as minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester. I am serving in my second term as President of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Coalition for Equity and Justice.

If SB 913 were to become law, it would require employers with fifty or more employees to provide paid sick leave to certain employees for use for the employee's sickness, the employee's child's, parent's or spouse's sickness, or to deal with sexual assault or family violence issues. In my view this is good, humane, economically sound public policy. It is abundantly clear to me that in the absence of paid sick leave benefits, all parties suffer, especially low income workers and the companies who employ them. While I arrive at this view based on a moral conviction that we as a society ought to treat workers with the utmost dignity and respect, my position is also based on 1) my experience providing pastoral support to parishioners who do not have paid sick leave benefit; 2) my experience supervising workers in three small non-profit organizations where paid sick leave benefits have been very generous; and 3) my research into this issue.

Clearly, low income workers who do not wish to lose income yet who are sick or who have a sick family member are forced to make difficult choices. Either they elect to come to work sick, send their children to school sick, and avoid seeking necessary medical care, or they forgo their paycheck for the period of the illness and face the various stresses associated with increased financial vulnerability, including the possibility of losing their employment altogether.

Employers whose workers are coming to work sick must contend with the public health crisis this generates, along with decreased productivity, low employee morale, and higher workforce turnover rates. These dynamics are well-documented in a February 23rd report from Human Rights Watch entitled “Failing its Families: Lack of Paid Leave and Work-Family Supports in the US.” While this report focuses primarily on the impact of pregnancy and childbirth on workers who do not have paid sick leave, its data are very clear: the presence of paid sick leave benefits contribute to overall employee productivity and company profitability. The report indicates that those states where paid sick leave laws exist, as well as European Union nations and member nations of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development where paid sick leave laws are the norm, report overall positive or neutral impacts on a variety of success factors for businesses of all sizes.

Critics of SB 913 will appeal to the need to strengthen businesses in order to create good jobs in a tough economic climate. They will describe SB 913 as job-killing, anti-business legislation. Certainly paid sick leave benefits present an increased cost to Connecticut businesses; but far too often we forget the long-term economic benefits and allow ourselves to pit business and worker interests against each other. *Businesses will not thrive if workers cannot thrive.* I urge you to take this notion seriously. I urge you not to succumb to arguments that link a weak business climate to worker protections such as paid sick days. When workers feel secure, businesses succeed. When workers know their employers care about their health and well-being, business succeed. When workers feel their human dignity is respected, businesses succeed. When workers have the appropriate resources to keep themselves and their families healthy, businesses succeed. Please support SB 913. Thank you.