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Testimony for Robert Camacho

Labor and Public Employee Committee on the issue of ~~SB~~SB913

I support the measure to ensure that more Connecticut residents receive paid sick days. This issue has been too long eschewed much to the detriment of not only employee health but also public health standards of contagion control. The topic has been warped so that dialogue on this issue invariably leads to the cost on businesses. There is plenty of research on this issue that renders the cost on business argument moot. I testify before this committee as a concerned citizen, employee formerly denied paid sick days, and an educator who has seen firsthand the effects on students by the denial of this health right.

I first would like to address briefly the issue of the cost to businesses. I am certain that business owners are going to testify that they do not need more government regulation, that it will overburden the cost of doing business. I am, as a concerned citizen, aghast that these arguments are treated as persuasive. There are plenty of studies by respectable institutions that have found the cost for businesses that deny this standard to be higher than those who do not. Cornell University, to give just one example of many, found that ill workers on the job could account for up to 60% of corporate health costs.

What is more concerning is the seemingly laissez-faire stance that businesses should be free of this mandate. Issues concerning public health should be regarded as necessary and integral to the cost of doing business. The business argument against sick leave is akin to an argument against the FDA and health inspectors at restaurants because it forces the food service industry's cost of business to increase. As a side note, within the framework of purely a capitalist free-market economy not every business is able to survive. Denying safety standards to ensure that more businesses are able to continue is actually doing a disservice to the free-market economy and against every economic theory that I am aware of. If businesses are not able to provide a benefit or commodity to the community and produce a net gain they are economically unsound and therefore a burden to the system. These insolvent institutions should not dictate safety standards but rather the in order for institutions to be solvent they must be able to function within the basic parameters of their society. Acquiescing to bad business practices is one of the mistakes economists refer to when they talk about the errors that caused the recent recession. Bad business practice and bad businesses harm the economy and should of course not be allowed to dictate policy.

On a more personal note I have had positions that have not provided paid sick leave. I was a server in restaurants for five years. I worked in three different states at numerous restaurants. In none of these workplaces was I allowed any paid sick time. I worked last year with a bartender who contracted swine flu, presumably on the job. At the first signs of his illness he came to work anyway. There were two days he was at work, contagious,

with the beginnings of H1N1. There is no way to quantify how many people Brian infected but the increased probability of infection was due to his lack of paid sick time. Had he been able to take time off of work he would have been home during his most contagious period. He would also have had the ability to realize the seriousness of his condition and not return to work. If we take seriously public health safety standards then offering paid sick time to restaurant workers in a non-issue.

I spent two years in Phoenix, Arizona as a K-8 grade art teacher. I have never been as sick as I was during that period of time. Children naturally contract viruses as their immune systems are still developing. The problem arises when the parents of these children are not able to properly care for them when they become ill. By sending children to school sick parents are unintentionally causing a rise in education costs as the demand for substitutes increases. With education funding being one of the controversial budget cuts proposed in many states this is no small issue.

I do not find the topic of paid sick leave contentious. I find there is no cogent reason to oppose this legislation. Not only is this a necessary safeguard for society and smart fiscally, but it is also a basic human right. We have too long overlooked what the Greeks understood over a thousand of years ago. A central concern for all human beings should be, in Greek, epimelesthai sautou "take care of yourself." It is a basic human right to have the ability to care for.

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