

March 5, 2015

**Testimony in support of HB 6784, An Act Expanding Paid Sick Leave**

To the Co-chairs and members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Katherine Bozelko and I am a resident of Orange. I have been a registered nurse employed by the City of New Haven for the past twenty-one years. Since 1994, I have worked in all of the New Haven school's nursing offices for high school, middle school, elementary and special needs populations.

From your own experience, you know that one important function of the school nurse is to assess students who complain that they have become sick during the school day and contact their parents or guardians if their conditions warrant their leaving school for the day.

Especially this winter when school age children have been threatened by two epidemics: a flu virus that is very effective in outsmarting the flu vaccine and a measles epidemic that can appear in any city at any time, I have needed to send children home when I recognize certain symptoms. While I do care about the ill student's comfort, the need to send the students home is to contain the spread of whatever infectious agent is making them sick.

Because so many of New Haven's students come from working-poor families, I often call parents/guardians at work and ask them to pick up their children. In the past twenty-one years, I would estimate that at least two hundred times I was told by concerned, good parents that they could not come to get their sick children either because 1) their managers would not allow them to leave mid-shift or 2) they could not afford to miss hours at work. Many of these parents are employed by small businesses -- bakeries, restaurants, small offices that do not have extensive human resources.

As a result of the parents' inability to come and collect their children, I am forced to keep the ill student in my office where other students come to use their asthma pumps or to receive insulin for their juvenile diabetes. My office experiences quite a bit of traffic.

As a result, the infectious disease -- flu, cold, strep throat, conjunctivitis -- spreads. More parents must be called. More parents must decide between staying at work and leaving their children to wait for them or losing money that may pay for that week's meals. I do not blame parents who feel that their financial circumstances are such that they cannot come pick up their children because they will have no money at the end of the week. They are doing the best they can.

I am here today to ask the General Assembly to do better for the parents of sick children who are doing the best they can. Paid Sick Days are essential to protecting the health of school children, family finances and the collective public health of every community. The state showed leadership in 2011 by passing the initial law for large employers, but now we must build upon that success. Please pass this bill to provide the protection of paid sick days to all workers, because eventually everyone gets sick.

Katherine Bozelko  
Orange