

# SICK LEAVE

*The Maryland General Assembly is expected to take up legislation that would set mandatory guidelines for private sector businesses when it comes to sick leave for employees.*

## Employees shouldn't have to choose between job, health

As a growing number of cities and states enact earned sick days policies, a trend is emerging. Small business owners are not only joining campaign efforts, they are actively advancing them.

The same will be true in Maryland when the Healthy Working Families Act is reintroduced later this month.

Led by Delegate Luke Clippinger, Senator Catherine Pugh, and nearly 100 co-sponsors in 2015, the bill would allow workers to earn one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked, up to seven days per year for a full-time worker. Employers with existing leave policies such as paid time off (PTO) that meet the required minimum number of days would not need to adjust their policies.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research estimates that 40 percent of Maryland's workforce – and nearly 80 percent of the state's lowest-wage workers – are unable to earn paid sick days. With so many families relying on dual incomes as a necessity to make ends meet, a single bout with the flu or a child's ear infection can lead to financial disaster.

Working Matters, the coalition founded in 2013 to advance Maryland's campaign for earned sick days, has grown to more than 140 organizational members and nearly 20,000 individual Marylanders. Such broad geographic and demographic support reflects the fact that working people want to be able to succeed at their jobs, without being penalized for doing right by their families.

This issue affects everyone, regardless of income, especially as parents without access to earned sick days are more than twice as likely to send a sick child to school or daycare. During last year's bill hearings, a school nurse from Howard County described how her office was regularly full of sick children whose parents could not leave work to pick them up.

Voters want Maryland to do better. In a re-



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cent University of Maryland-Washington Post poll, 83 percent of respondents, including 91 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans, expressed support for the legislation.

As public backing grows, so does support from the business community. Citing the need for a level playing field and benefits to their bottom line due to decreased turnover and higher productivity, several small businesses — including local restaurants, retailers, and child care centers — have added their voices to Working Matters. Other supporters include the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Majority, and the President's Roundtable (an association of area African-American entrepreneurs).

A Bloomberg article published earlier this year ("Sick Leave Doesn't Hurt Business, Says

Business") noted that while philosophical opposition to earned sick days policies may always exist for some, the economic impact of such legislation is minimal. In examining data from jurisdictions with earned sick days statutes, cost increases were small to none, and employee abuse of the policy was virtually non-existent.

In other cities and states where opponents have warned that businesses would flee, such dire predictions have simply not come to fruition. After the District of Columbia enacted earned sick days legislation in 2008, a city auditor's report found that the law had not deterred businesses from staying in Washington. In fact, D.C. lawmakers later strengthened and expanded the statute. The same is true for New York City.

Similarly, in the five years following the passage of San Francisco's law, employment grew at twice the rate of the five surrounding counties lacking such policies. Two years after legislation passed in Connecticut, more than three-quarters of employers expressed support for the law.

In addition, researchers have found that flu rates declined considerably in U.S. cities that implemented earned sick days policies. Given the rarity of such policies in the food service industry, it is not surprising that more than half of food service workers report going to work while sick. Several shared their stories with Maryland legislators last year, describing disturbing situations where staff took breaks to vomit during food preparation duties, after a stomach virus struck the kitchen.

Over 700,000 Marylanders continue to face impossible choices between their jobs and their health – between their family's economic security and the well-being of their children – all while policymakers have failed to act. The Maryland General Assembly can do better in 2016.