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Oregon Senate Democrats stand up for working families, approve statewide Paid Sick Time proposal

SB 454 will make Oregon fourth state in the nation with statewide policy

SALEM – Democrats in the Senate approved legislation today that will create a statewide paid sick leave policy for Oregon workers. Senate Bill 454 requires most employers having ten or more employees to implement a sick time policy allowing an employee to earn, accrue, donate or use up to 40 hours of paid sick time per year. Additionally, the bill requires most employers who employ fewer than ten employees to implement an unpaid sick time policy.

“This is a historic day for workers in Oregon. Senate Bill 454 was a key priority for Senate Democrats heading into 2015 and it is not an exaggeration to say that Paid Sick Leave is the most important policy we will advance this legislative session,” said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland). “Working people shouldn’t be forced to choose between their jobs and their health. With this statewide paid sick time policy, Oregon workers won’t have to put their co-workers, their customers, and their children at risk.”

The United States is the only industrialized country in the world without a national requirement that workers get access to paid sick leave. Approximately 40 percent of private-sector employees work at a company that does not offer sick pay for their own illness or injury. It is well-documented that low- and middle-income workers are much less likely to be offered paid sick leave than highly paid workers.

“If you are a higher-wage worker in this state, then you almost certainly have the ability to take time off from work in order to care for yourself or your children when the need arises,” said

Senator Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), chair of the Senate Workforce Committee and co-carrier of the bill. “However, if you are a low-wage worker, you are in the exact opposite situation—80 percent of low-wage workers get no paid leave at all. This is one of the most striking examples of inequity that we face. Today we take a huge step toward addressing this injustice toward working families.”

In President Barack Obama’s 2015 State of the Union address, the President announced his support for national legislation that would allow millions of working Americans to earn paid sick time, which they could use to care for themselves or for a sick family member. With Congress failing to act on a national paid leave policy, action on paid sick leave has been focused on the local and state level. Once signed into law, Oregon will join California, Connecticut, and Massachusetts as states with a newly enacted paid sick leave policy.

“When employers do not provide sick days for their employees, it fosters an environment that encourages workers to come to work ill, and forces low-wage employees to choose between paying their rent or working while sick,” said Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Beaverton), who co-carried the bill on the Senate floor and co-chaired an interim work group that crafted the policy behind SB 454. “Similarly, many parents have to make the tough choice to send their children to school or daycare sick because they are not able to stay home and care for them. These situations create serious health concerns not just for the sick worker or child, but for their co-workers, classmates, and the general public.”

The City of Portland implemented a paid sick leave ordinance in 2013 requiring employers with at least six employees to provide paid sick leave and smaller employers to provide unpaid, protected sick time. The City of Eugene followed in 2014 with a requirement that all employers provide paid sick leave. Under SB 454, the six employee threshold for the City of Portland will remain intact. Elsewhere in the state, the ten employee threshold outlined in SB 454 will become law. The bill will now go to the floor of the House of Representatives for consideration.

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