

Submitted by OSEA on behalf of:
Ellen L. VanSlyke

Gresham, Oregon

I'm a school bus driver in Oregon and, since I'm involved in transporting children with special needs, I'm in my bus from seven to eight hours a day. I have done this work since 1996 so I have seen a number of Cold & Flu Seasons at our location. You may be thinking that this represents six to eight weeks a year but the reality is that Cold & Flu Season for school bus drivers who don't have the benefit of paid sick leave, is actually six to eight months long. While parents tend to keep their children home when it becomes evident that they are sick, school bus drivers working for a private corporation like First Student where sick leave is not provided tend to come to work sick.

I am told by long-term drivers that the company I work for use to be owned by a local family and they provided drivers with paid sick leave. It built over time if you didn't use it so drivers were able to stay home until they knew they were not contagious. Those were the years that Cold & Flu Seasons were not nearly as long. As it is now, drivers are constantly re-exposing each other and the children they transport. It is not a good situation.

A couple years ago, we drivers organized under OSEA and, while in negotiations, we came to realize that some employers believe there is no value in sick leave if it costs them money. In fact, we were told by First Student's corporate representative that sick leave for school bus drivers was nothing more than paid time off. But we are a group of conscientious adults who value the lives of the children we transport and we value the welfare of each other as well. We do what we can to protect each other but every single one of us has come to work on days that we should not have done so. As a school bus driver in our great, green state, I am asking you, our lawmakers, to respect the needs of your constituents and pass the Paid Sick Leave bill. When it comes to the welfare of Oregon's children and their drivers, paid sick leave is the only thing that makes sense. On behalf of all school bus drivers, the children we transport, and all other Oregonians in the work force, I'm standing with others in asking you to please vote "YES" on this important bill and say "YES" to better health for school bus drivers and the children of Oregon.

Respectfully,
Ellen L. VanSlyke