

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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February 16, 2015

To: Senate Workforce and House Business and Labor Committee
Re: Support of SB 454 and HB 2005

Dear Chairs Dembrow and Holvey and Committee Members,

For too many families in Oregon, taking a child to the doctor or staying home with the flu means losing pay—or even a job. Just a few paid sick days a year can provide working families with a much needed measure of economic security, especially in these tough economic times. That is why Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) urges you to vote for SB 454 and HB 2005, allowing all Oregon employees to earn paid sick time. This policy will help Oregon workers keep their jobs, support their families, stay healthy and prevent poverty.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO), a state-wide ecumenical and interfaith organization, is committed to the welfare of all children and the overall health and economic stability of families and communities. Our social principles state:

“We are called to ‘love justice’ and to act in solidarity with those on the margins. Justice requires us to establish social and economic systems that encourage, enable and empower all people to develop and use their capabilities to meet their needs and to contribute to the social welfare. Properly functioning market economies require both ethical and legal regulation to safeguard public health and protect the health and well-being of workers, consumers and the general public. EMO supports government action when necessary to promote these values.”

The debate about paid sick leave, at its core, is about values. It is undisputed that high percentages of low-income workers, particularly women and Latinos, currently lack the access to paid sick leave taken for granted by more privileged populations. While only 18 percent of the highest wage earners lack paid sick time, a shocking 47 percent of private-sector workers don't earn a single hour of paid sick time while they work. Of those, certain groups are less likely to have access to paid sick time and are more challenged by not having it than others, including people of color, low-wage earners and single parents. Seventy-one percent of low-wage workers in Oregon don't earn paid sick days while they work. The lack of paid sick time has a profoundly negative effect on the workers and on their entire, interconnected community.

Working parents shouldn't have to choose between staying home to take care of a sick child and keeping their jobs. Cash-strapped families shouldn't have to lose pay when illness strikes. By making paid sick time available, employers increase productivity and save money in the long run. Employees who come to work sick are less productive, recover more slowly and are likely to spread illness to co-workers and to the community.

We urge you to pass SB 454 and HB 2005. Allowing workers to earn sick time is not only smart business policy; it is a just and ethical policy that benefits employers, workers and their families.

Sincerely,

Jan Elfers
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Public Policy Director