

February 16, 2015

To: Senate Workforce and House Business and Labor Committees
From: Rose Wilde, Board Member, Womenspace Inc.
Re: Support of SB454 and HB2005

Dear Chairs Dembrow and Holvey and Committee Members,

When considering expanding earned sick leave benefits to Oregon workers, I encourage legislators to listen to survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual assault and stalking. In my 15 years as an advocate for survivors of domestic violence and human services professional, I have had contact with hundreds of survivors of these forms of violence and abuse. In that time, I have learned that economic independence is a key factor in achieving safety and stability after violence. The ability to accrue and use sick leave benefits during a crisis related to domestic and sexual violence allows the survivors and their families to seek out safe housing, participate in legal processes, and access medical and support services to facilitate their recovery without loss of wages.

Last year I assisted a friend who was leaving an abusive relationship after several years of escalating abuse. We spent all day driving around town applying for emergency assistance and looking for housing for my friend and her children. She was worried about the time lost at work, but fortunately her employer was sympathetic and granted her paid time off and job security during this critical time. Without this my friend would have either been short the cash necessary to pay her first, last, and deposit, or perhaps might not have attempted to leave the relationship until she was able to put away additional savings. Her partner was also financially exploiting my friend, and he would often demand her wages and spend the money she was hoping to save up for her move.

My friend is now in a safe home and independent from her former abuser. Her children are settled into new schools and thriving in their safer environment. Just one day off provided the time my friend needed to figure out where to go so her children would never have to listen to an abusive person destroy their property and make a scene in the street, as he did the night before they left. My friend recently got a promotion at work and is working her way to being able to help her daughters pay for college. A little bit of help during a time of crisis made a huge difference.

People like my friend should not have to rely on the kindness of their employer, they should have the ability to earn paid time off to take care of emergencies, such as those related to domestic violence, and have the job security to know there will be a job for them to go back to once the initial crisis is past; no matter who they work for.

I encourage all legislators to consider how paid time off impacts the safety of families impacted by violence and vote yes for paid sick days in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Rose Wilde
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