



Testimony of the Urban League of Portland:

My name is Midge Purcell, I am with the Urban League of Portland and I'm here to support HB2005 and SB454 which would allow most Oregon employees to earn paid sick time.

The Urban League support this bill not only because it will benefit all working Oregonians, but because a high proportion of African Americans, 44% or women and nearly 50% of African American men– are not able to earn a single paid sick day to use to recover from common illnesses.

When illness strikes, they have to risk their economic security by staying home, or their health or a family member's health by going to work.

In Oregon nearly 30% of African American families live in poverty; and many of them are working poor – as 20% of Black women and 28 % of black men are underemployed.

For these families, living pay check to pay check losing precious income due to illness is no small matter. And even a few days of lost pay means that they may have to decide between paying the rent and buying groceries or paying their utility bill.

There is also the challenge of job retention. Unfortunately discrimination and hostile work environments are still a reality in some workplaces. Too many Black workers feel insecure and vulnerable at work.

One of our clients was recently party to a landmark discrimination case in Oregon because of the horrendous racial abuse he experienced on the job. Fortunately while the scale of that case was extreme, many black workers experience varying degrees of micro-aggression at work that make them fearful of losing their jobs.

Workers losing jobs because when they miss work because of illness is a serious threat: A 2010 national survey revealed that 16% of workers had reported being fired for taking time off work to care for a sick child or family member or to cope with their own illness.

Further, *fear* of job loss is greater for workers of color than for white workers. Nationally, 44% of white workers fear they will be fired if they miss any work time compared to 56% of Latino workers and 75% of African-American workers who experience the same fear.

The threat of job loss for taking an unsanctioned sick day is very real:

The Urban League receives calls from many of our community members who feel that they have been discriminated and victimized at work.

One particular case comes to mind where a woman felt that she wasn't welcome at her work place but was determined to stay. She did everything above and beyond to appease her supervisor; but when she became so ill she had to seek emergency care and was out for two days, she was written up and eventually dismissed.

She actually won her case with BOLI's help, but many have no recourse. No-one should be fired, suspended, written up or penalized by an employer for taking time off from work to care for a sick child or family member, or to cope with an illness.

The Urban League believes that Paid Sick Days can provide additional job security. The risk of losing your job due to a common illness or the need for routine medical care for yourself or your child is a very real threat to African American families.

In a time of lingering high unemployment, this level of fear of job loss among communities of color can cause stress that compromise health and well-being.

Unemployment in the black community is currently 18%. One parent families are particularly vulnerable. The average unemployed African American worker searches nearly 10 months for a new job.

We urge support and passage of Paid Sick Days. Thank you for your time.

Submitted

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