

Senate Workforce and House Business and Labor Committees
Testimony in Support of SB 454 and HB 2005
February 16th, 2015

Chair and members of the committee:

My name is Jane Carlson and I am the Zone II Director of the Oregon School Employees Association, the OSEA Molalla River Chapter 110 President, and Head Elementary Secretary at Molalla Elementary School, 910 Toliver Rd, Molalla, OR 97038. I've worked for Molalla River School District for 22 years, the past 18 as a Head Elementary Secretary, the last 6 at Molalla Elementary School. I speak in favor of paid sick leave, SB 454 and HB 2005.

The number of sick children at school that I see can vary day-to-day; 12-15 kids is a good average with approximately 1/3 having to be excluded from school activities that day. Students come to the office first thing in the morning from the bus and they complain they don't feel good. It can be the child has a fever or feels like they are going to vomit.

When I make the initial call to parents, there is sometimes a pause before they respond, like they are quickly thinking of what they are going to have to do: talk to their boss? Find someone to pick up the child? Stall getting to the school as long as possible? They say they can't come right away and we ask parent to find someone to pick up child. We sometimes don't hear back for a couple hours, we call the parent back and they say they can't find anyone to pick up their sick child and he/she will have to stay at school and ride the bus home. We have to tell parent the child can't ride the bus home because they are contagious.

This is a daily problem within schools. Students come in and say they threw up at home and parents send them to school because no one can stay home with the child. They come in with a fever and they tell us they were sick in the night and their parent had to go to work. There are days when the office is like an infirmary with sick children waiting for their parent to get off work. Although school is dismissed at 3:25pm, I have had to stay at school with sick children until past 4:00pm many times, waiting for their parent to pick them up.

For those parents who work nearby, if their child is old enough to stay at home by themselves, they can pick up their child during their lunch break and drop them off at home then head back to work. But for parents who are working out of town, if they come to pick up their child, they are taking off the rest of their workday which, for many, means they have to take a pay cut to take care of their child.

A student's ability to learn can be effected by sickness. Students cannot concentrate on learning when ill. It's devastating to vomit in front of others, worse when they are not near a trash can. A good indication of a possible fever is when the student puts their head down on the desk and cries, or falls asleep.

Being held at school, one sick student can easily spread sickness to others. Something as minor as pink eye, a common childhood disease, is highly contagious in a school setting and probable to eventually run a course infecting the whole classroom.

When determined to be contagious, the child is not allowed back in class and is now under the supervision of the office staff. Health rooms are most commonly adjacent to the office. Our school has two cots so the overflow of sick children goes into the office area, usually sitting next to the two secretaries.

Sickness, consequently, also spreads easily to school employees. In 2001, I had a student in my office with suspected chicken pox. The parent could not leave work early and the child spent the day (5 hours) in my office waiting to be picked up. She had a cough, was feverish and crying as she did not feel good and wanted her mom. She would come up to me in tears, not feeling good, coughing and crying. A few times she leaned her head on my arm while coughing and crying asking me when her mommy was coming to take her home. I think she was 7 years old. Later, it was medically confirmed that she had chicken pox. Approximately 12 days later, I had a blister on my right calf and my leg/hip developed pain that felt like an electric shock. By the time I was diagnosed, I had shingles along the full length of my leg and could barely walk. I filed a workman's comp claim for an occupational disease.

The long term result of being exposed to this child whose parent could not leave work was devastating to me. I missed the last month of school and was sick most of the summer, developing the chicken pox rash and suffering from Herpes Zoster around my nose, mouth and chin. I had to miss my son's high school graduation when I had shingles, and, his celebration with family was postponed until August that year until I was well again. With this virus, I now have autoimmune issues, in addition to existing multiple food allergies and some environmental allergies. My doctor recommends that I don't have the flu, pneumonia or shingles shots, however, due to food allergies. I have suffered from periodic shingles outbreaks since, and will for the rest of my life.

Having paid sick leave would provide parents of sick children an opportunity to leave work without having to debate over whether their employment or paycheck is at risk by prioritizing their children's health. It would alleviate the amount of suffering for the child, allowing the child to recover from sickness and come back to school in better health and able to learn. This would help prevent sickness from spreading to everyone in school, allowing for a healthy school environment. For all the reasons I have outlined here for you, I implore you to support this legislation for paid sick leave, SB 454 and HB 2005. Thank you for your consideration.

Jane Carlson