

April 3, 2013

Chair Dohrety, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Steve Hughes and I am the State Director of the Oregon Working Families Party. We are an independent, grassroots political party dedicated to fighting for the bread and butter economic issues that matter to working people.

I sit before you today after more than a year of hard work on behalf of my organization's leaders, members, and staff, as well as the many other members of the broad coalition that has formed around the idea that all Oregonians deserve the right to take the day off when they or a family member is ill.

I'd also like to publicly acknowledge the very hard work and leadership of the Chair of the WFP, Jeff Anderson from the United Food and Commercial Workers. I can tell you from having spoken to members of his union—a majority of whom work in the food service industry—this is an issue that cuts to the very core for people in food service. The last place workers want to be when they have the flu is at work handling other people's food. And I submit to you that this is also the last place WE would want them to be. Make no mistake, what we are discussing here is addressing a direct threat to the public health.

Our organization has been involved in grassroots outreach around this issue for many months. What we can tell you from talking to many, many people on the doorsteps and on the phones is that this issue just seems like plain common sense to most Oregonians.

I know that opponents of this bill argue that it is bad for business; that this is one more regulation that will decrease the competitiveness of our state. However, in the face of similar objections, on January 1, 2012 the state of Connecticut passed statewide earned sick days legislation. What has been the experience of Connecticut so far? If Connecticut Department of Labor statistics are to be believed, their experience has been one of steady employment growth in the hospitality and service sectors since passage of the law. This is significant because this employment sector is one with the highest concentration of workers without earned sick days, and yet passage of the Connecticut law did not slow job growth there.

To sum up, this is a public health issue and an issue of common sense to most Oregonians. Despite wild claims by opponents that this bill is the end of business as we know it in the state of Oregon, the facts paint a very different picture. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

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