

Testimony on in Support of SB 588

Members of LiUNA Local 737

February 4, 2021

Chair Riley and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 588.

We are writing to offer support for SB 588 because it represents a common-sense solution for helping to ensure that workers are no longer excluded from being able to access to basic earned sick leave standards and employment protections that currently apply to most all sectors today. We know that when workers do not have paid time off, they are 1.5 times more likely to go to work even when they have a contagious illness¹. That is why we cannot wait any longer to close the loophole in the current Paid Sick Leave law to ensure that union members hired through hiring halls are able to stay home when they are sick or care for their loved ones when needed.

Senate Bill 588 helps better ensure that more workers do not have to face impossible choices between going to work sick or risking infection or foregoing their income to stay home when needed. LiUNA Local 737 surveyed our rank-and-file membership about this very issue, and we wanted to share some of what they told us. Below provides situations in which LiUNA Local 737 members encountered the harsh and dangerous options of deciding to go to work or not receive pay to address their and their families' healthcare needs.

"I woke up one morning feeling a little low (I have blood sugar problems and have yet to be diagnosed with anything specific). I was weak and shaky, but this was something I have experienced many times before. I decided to head to work anyways, because I figured if I drank some orange juice and had breakfast my blood sugar would jump back up; plus, I could not afford financially to miss a day. My fiancé lost her job and so I was the only source of income in our house. I got to work, and by that time I felt better, but about 2 hours into my shift my sugar crashed again. I started shaking and my coworkers told me I was pale but wanting not to go home sick and lose money I told them I could stick it out. An hour later, I began to feel even more weak. This time I knew if I continued to work, I could possibly harm myself or a coworker, and eventually if my blood sugar dropped low enough I would pass out. So as hard as it was to lose the money I went home. My foreman was very understanding and told me to take care of myself, but the financial loss was stressful." – John. W., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I have to work sick or the bills don't get paid. If I don't work, I don't get health insurance for me or my children." – Daniel, B., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"It's been tough and I've had to come to work in compromising times, and for family deaths, hard to take off, when I know I should not be there. Unsafe, not to keep mind on the job." – Patsey. M., LiUNA Local 737 Member

¹ Smith, T. W., & Kim, J. (2010, June). Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences. National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for the Public Welfare Foundation Publication

Feel the Power

"My children, who are little and cannot stay home alone when sick, have been sick recently. I have had to lose hours of work and work extra Saturdays just to make ends meet, because I don't have paid time off/sick pay. Being a single mother in this field is hard." -Taylor R., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I have had my fiancé be sick for a few days and sadly, I could not tend to her because I needed to work to support the family and pay the bills. It would have been nice to have the sick days to tend to her when she was ill." – Dylan F., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"Recently my wife was in the hospital for three days and I was in the hospital with her for those three days. I didn't get pay at all. I have been working steadily for quite a while and I know I've earned the hours and it is difficult that you have to pick between working and being there for your wife or your loved ones at a time we need. Of course I picked my wife, but it sucks that my monthly bills get tampered with because the lack of me not being able to work due to health issues with my loved ones." – Jeff A., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"During the wildfires I took time off due to asthma. Job was in Central Oregon and the air quality was extremely hazardous. I got sick working in it and took 3 days off due to lung issues. I was not provided paid sick leave and laid off 2 days later." – Patrick G., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I have had to take unpaid time off many times throughout my years as a laborer. I also come to work sometimes when I really shouldn't be there sick, but needed the hours to pay my bills." -Tim B., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"Lack of access to paid sick leave MAY be a determining factor as to whether or not I stay in construction. I am a disabled veteran and have chronic health problems as a result of my military service. Sometimes my health makes it very difficult and or/impossible to work in such a physical environment. Also, EVERYONE GETS SICK. Even before COVID, cold and flu season pops up every year. We sacrifice our bodies every day in ways most do not, and not being able to get sick just exacerbates an already demanding career. We get sick and our kids get sick. We deserve to take care of ourselves and pay our bills too." – Emma M., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I'm a single parent to two girls....and any type of unpaid leave is really felt in my household..." – Humberto P., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I just had my baby girl, she was born with a medical condition that required hospital stay. Since I did not have any type of paid leave available, I wasn't able to bond with her at the hospital, since my hours of work were out of visitation hours. Asking for time off would have ended in termination of my employment. Being at work not able to see my baby girl was very difficult. We deserve to paid sick leave. Our family's health, my health and safety is at risk when working under sick conditions." – Gerardo M., LiUNA Local 737 Member

Additionally, below outlines the clear support and need of paid sick time from LiUNA Local 737 members:

"I think paid sick time is something we have earned. In the construction industry, coming to work sick can be a deadly action. You can cause an accident that can hurt yourself or others. I've worked sitting behind a desk before and being sick was miserable but doable. We do not have that luxury in this field. Also, a lot of us have families, and if they are sick it would be nice to be able to take them to a doctor or go get them medicine without having to worry about the financial loss. – Josh W., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"The older I get, the harder it is for me to recuperate from being sick. No sick leave puts a financial strain on my whole family. We need to prosper more without constant stress or worry about if we got enough hours banked for our insurance or sick time banked to pay our bills." – Daniel B., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"We work hard and deserve to get sick leave paid and not have to worry about money. We give our bodies and health to this career." – Jordan, B., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I see coming to work sick unfortunately, as more of a realistic version of today's time with COVID, as a thing. No one can afford to stay home unpaid, long - especially a week or two, while you are considered to be sick with COVID (even if it's a regular cold or flu). It's a shame this (pandemic) only gets better with honesty, but honesty gets us home, broke ... so I feel most would suck it up and keep it to themselves if they are not well off enough to take that time financially." – John. W., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"My kids get sick all the time; I could use sick time for that. I've been sick and needed to pay my bills and had to sell several of my items, just to cover that. I've been in a situation where I was in an accident and needed sick time." – Chad N., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I think we should get sick time because of our line work. We need something to fall back on if we get sick so we will not worry what we would do if we miss work or if we feel sick." – Jose P., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"Especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, paid sick time is something that should be strongly considered for all employers and all trades. Some employees can't change the fact that they have chronic health issues that may cause extra time off, they may get sick, or they may even be forced to take time off due to COVID when they weren't directly exposed, but are suffering financially, nonetheless. – Alex C., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"I have a family of 7 that depends on my income to provide stability in our household. I am unable to stay home when feeling ill, as we have bills to pay. Even when feeling sick you will find me at work, since we have no sick paid leave available. All of our positions are outdoors, we work in any type of inclement weather conditions. We work hard every day in our communities to build for a better future." – Gerardo M., LiUNA Local 737 Member

"Every time my children or I become sick or ill and I need to take time off I always fear being replaced at work. I fear losing money and not being able to feed them or fear losing our home or my vehicle to get to work. It's always stressful thinking of the consequences of taking needed time off to take care of my children." – Jeffery O., LiUNA Local 737 Member

We, the members of LiUNA Local 737 urge your support for SB 588.

Sincerely,

LiUNA Local 737