



Business Voices: Implementation of Sick Days Laws is Straightforward

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San Francisco and Washington DC employers see administrative ease

Around the nation, city councils and state legislatures are increasingly considering legislation to establish a sick days' law. Employers, particularly those who are not familiar with sick days' policy, are leery of administering it. For some, this worry leads them to oppose passage of legislation. However, in locations where laws are already implemented, many businesses have stepped forward to acknowledge that administering sick days' policy is actually pretty simple.

The legislative proposals that are under consideration in different parts of the country differ in their details, but all seek to set a floor that provides workers some paid days to address health-related issues, such as a bout of the flu, a child breaking an arm, or getting a child his vaccinations for school. The floor is like the minimum wage; it sets the bottom line above which employers may choose to add more time. Unlike the minimum wage, the sick days' laws are based on the amount of time worked: pay for sick days' is tied to hours on the job. Workers earn their pay for sick days.

The impetus for local action is straightforward: as yet there is no national law. A federal bill, the Healthy Families Act, has been introduced. But in the absence of federal law, local action is the avenue to address the significant, unmet need: about 40 percent of the nation's private sector workforce does not have access to paid sick days. The result for many workers is that taking a sick day causes a loss of wages and sometimes even a loss of jobs.

Local and state governments have passed laws. Earned sick days laws are established in Portland, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., as well as the state of Connecticut. The Philadelphia City Council passed a measure that awaits the Mayor's signature.

Legislation is pending in a variety of states and cities. Where legislation is debated, the worries of businesses should be heard and addressed. Some concerns are driven by human nature – e.g. anxiety about the unknown. If a business has not administered paid sick days, it is natural to be worried about whether, for example, it might translate into huge administrative nightmare.

Businesses in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. are already implementing city earned sick days' laws. The quotes that follow underscore the view that administration did not turn into the huge burden some feared, including some of the businesses quoted below.

San Francisco Employers Speak Out

“It is easy for me to keep track of the accrual of paid sick time in San Francisco. Our law requires that employees accrue one hour of paid time off per every thirty hours worked. My payroll system calculates it for me – it is simply 3.33% of hours worked per pay period. Once the employee reaches the maximum amount of sick leave accrued per year, then I stop adding to the leave total and roll over any remaining time at the end of the year, as is required by our law. Keeping track of paid sick time requires very little effort on my part.”

Jennifer Piallat, Zazie Bistro

“A lot of the anxiety was around implementation and the bureaucracy of implantation, the reporting, and making sure we did it accurately so we wouldn’t get in trouble; but once we began to understand it and how our payroll software worked with it, we embraced it and realized that this could be a cool thing, and it has been.”

Sam Mogannum, Bi-Rite Market

“We didn’t embrace it earlier...but in the end, it turned out to be something that was okay and pretty much a non-issue.”

Dave McLean, Magnolia Pub & Brewery

“I wasn’t opposed to it [sick days], but I’m always cautious when entering into something like this, especially when I don’t know what the end result is going to be, but in the end, it has been quite easy to implement.”

Jeff Hanak, Nopa and Nopalito

DC Employers Speak Out

“Once we made the change, it [implementation] was really straight forward and from a human resource standpoint, it is really quite simple.”

Jeremiah Cole, Tabard Inn

“Implementation is not hard at all. It is very easy. All you need to do is setup your accrual rate. If you have a payroll company to help you with your payroll they will set it up for you. It is totally painless...It is not expensive at all to implement.”

Deborah McClintock, Bedazzled

“Implementation is really not that difficult. With technology these days, implementing sick days should not be that much of a problem.”

Andy Shallal, Bus Boys and Poets

Resources

For a full interview from the featured business owners:

Zazie Bistro

<http://vimeo.com/16063307>

Tabard Inn, Bedazzled, and Bus Boys and Poets

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLE883BAD9C22980B1>

also see:

http://www.clasp.org/issues/pages?type=work_life_and_job_quality&id=0009#employersspeakout