

## Public Health Risks and Small Business testimony on Earned Sick Time

Good Morning/Afternoon. My name is Ricardo McQueen and I am speaking here today as a small business owner and an expert in public health. I am the owner and president of Food Health & Environmental Safety in Orlando, Florida and have more than a decade of experience providing health and safety audits, training, food industry certifications, and compliance assistance for hospitality, medical and environmental businesses. Some of my larger clients have included Starbucks, Purity Bakery, Comfort Suites and British Colonial Hilton.

From my perspective as a small business owner the cost of earned sick time is negligible while the benefits are great for both business owners and public health.

Small business owners appreciate the stability and productivity that comes with earned sick time. Turnover can cost anywhere from 25 to 200 percent of a worker's annual compensation.

Earned sick days also increase productivity due to eliminating "presenteeism" — which is when workers show up sick and unproductive. Presenteeism is estimated to cost our national economy \$160 billion annually, surpassing the cost of absenteeism. The cost of presenteeism in food service is particularly steep as we pay for it with our public health.

Earned sick days also lower healthcare and workman's compensation costs.

OSHA and CDC research shows that workers are 28% more likely to suffer workplace injuries when they don't have earned sick time.

Any way you look at it, earned sick time is good for small business, so let's move on to public health aspects.

Especially in food service, employees who work sick reduce business profits by endangering the health and productivity of other workers — as well as customers and the public.

Here's some fast facts:

1 IN 6 AMERICANS GETS SICK EVERY YEAR FROM FOOD WITH ABOUT 20% OF CASES TRACED TO AN ILL FOOD WORKER

46% OF ORANGE COUNTY WORKERS DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO SICK TIME, BUT IN FOOD SERVICE THAT NUMBER CAN BE AS HIGH AS 88%

NATIONALLY, 63% OF RESTAURANT WORKERS SURVEYED RESPONDED THEY HAD WORKED SERVING OR PREPARING FOOD WHILE SICK, AND the *Journal of Food Protection* found that 19.8% had worked while experiencing vomiting or diarrhea in the past year.

And so it's no wonder that...

92% AMERICANS FEEL IT IS IMPORTANT RESTAURANT WORKERS, SPECIFICALLY SERVERS AND COOKS, DO NOT HANDLE FOOD WHILE SICK

So what are the likely ways to get sick from a restaurant worker? Norovirus and influenza are two of the biggest concerns.

Norovirus is a common easily-transmitted food-borne illness that causes vomiting, diarrhea, cramping and fever. Half of all cases of foodborne illness in the U.S. can be attributed to norovirus infection. Nationally, 3,000 deaths and 125,000 hospitalizations resulted from food-borne illness according to the most recent data from the CDC.

The CDC advises that the measures most likely to reduce the incidence of norovirus are correct handling of cold foods, frequent hand washing and provision of paid sick leave.

Regarding influenza, just last week a new bird flu was reported in humans, H6N1. Back in 2009 and 2010 lack of sick leave policy contributed to the spread of H1N1 with sick workers estimated to have infected 7 million of their co-workers.

Guaranteeing earned sick days to workers will mitigate the impact of norovirus, influenza and other contagious diseases. In a tourist economy such as Central Florida, this translates directly to more economic activity as sick vacationers are hampered from shopping, visiting attractions and eating out.

Without government-protected sick leave, we are essentially leaving it up to low-wage restaurant workers to decide what's best for public health by choosing between infecting the public while working sick or losing their job.

Public health should be taken seriously enough to support common-sense policy that puts a buffer between sick workers and the public.

Finally, I believe that earned sick time policy is so valuable to public health that it should be considered at all levels of government. Small business owners working across county lines are already adept at dealing with the patchwork quilt of zoning, taxation and regulations that protect local economies. A common-sense earned sick time policy at the local, state or national level will result in improved public health, higher productivity and economic gains for all small businesses – and those who institute it first will have the competitive advantage of promoting superior public health policy.