

# Sick leave ordinance gets first hearing at Portland City Council

***In four hours of public comment, sentiment runs 3 to 1 in favor of a sick leave ordinance***

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

Portland City Council is on the verge of passing an ordinance giving workers the right to sick leave — a far-reaching advance that would improve working conditions for more than a quarter million workers.

The proposed ordinance had its first official hearing Jan. 31. Facing packed chambers, City Council heard close to four hours of public comment that ran more than three to one in favor of the ordinance. Those in favor included Multnomah County Commissioner Deborah Kafoury and state representatives Michael Dembrow, Alisa Keny-Guyer, and Jessica Vega Pederson, as well as leaders of at least half a dozen labor organizations, and officials responsible for public health in the Portland area. Speaking against it were a

handful of business owners and industry lobbyists, though some other business owners spoke in favor.

The proposed ordinance would require employers to provide one hour of sick leave for every 30 hours of work — up to 40 hours a year. It would be paid sick leave for employers with more than five employees, and unpaid for employers with five or fewer employees. Employees could use the sick leave when they or a close family member or domestic partner are sick, injured, or in need of preventive medical care.

The ordinance — introduced by Commissioner Amanda Fritz, is the first significant issue tackled by the newly installed Council in which Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick are new members.

Several city commissioners said they would support changes to make the ordinance clearer or more workable, but none appeared to be swayed by arguments that they should wait for the state Legislature to take action. Dembrow — a state representative from Northeast Portland and a longtime leader of American Federation of Teachers — read a letter signed by Oregon Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum declaring that City Council passage of a sick leave ordinance would only strengthen efforts to pass statewide legislation.

The Legislature would have plenty of time to act; Portland's ordinance, as proposed, would take effect Jan. 1, 2014. That's incidentally also when the most significant parts of the federal



**At a Jan. 31 hearing at Portland City Council, Fred Meyer employee and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 member Kimberly Johnson speaks in favor of a sick leave ordinance, alongside Local 555 Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Anderson.**

legislation known as Obamacare takes effect, so Portland workers would not only get the right to take time off when they were sick, but also would have access to affordable medical care.

Several business people — including the owners of Huber's and the Daily Cafe — said providing paid sick leave would be burdensome. But at the end of the hearing, Fritz said she was

more concerned about the hardship workers face when they work sick or lose wages. As for the cost to employers, if every worker used the maximum five sick days a year and had to be replaced during their absence, it would add 1.9 percent to payroll costs. In San Francisco, which has such an ordinance, workers use about three days a year on average. Meanwhile, at restaur-

rants, sick employees would likely seek to swap shifts, which the proposed Portland ordinance allows, rather than lose tips.

For union grocery workers, a significant feature of the ordinance is that it allows workers to use sick leave on the first day of an illness. Current grocery contracts with United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 provide paid sick leave, but the leave starts on the third day. Teresa McGrath — one of a contingent of Local 555 members at the hearing — told City Council how she lost her grocery checker job in November 2012 because she made a cash handling error while working dizzy and nauseated on the second day of a bout with the flu.

A 14-member task force chaired by Fritz and fellow Commissioner Dan Saltzman is meeting three times to discuss modifications to the proposal. One issue they'll consider is whether the ordinance should cover employees who are based elsewhere but work part of the time in Portland, including trucks that pass through.

The task force is about evenly split between advocates and critics of the ordinance, but Fritz said its task is to propose modifications to make the ordinance more workable, not to determine whether to proceed with the ordinance. The one labor representative on the task force is Local 555 Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Anderson.

City Council will hold a second hearing Feb. 27 on the ordinance, and a vote on it is tentatively scheduled for March 6.

## ***U.S. Bank joins as title sponsor of BULL Session***

U.S. Bank has joined the National Electrical Contractors Association/International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (NECA/IBEW) as co-title sponsor of the Business, Union, Labor, Leaders (BULL) Session.

The organization's fundraising event in Oregon takes place in September and includes a dinner/auction and one-day golf tournament.

Since its inception in 1991, the BULL Session has donated more than \$4.6 million to children's charities, including Children's Developmental Health Institute (formerly The Artz Center for Developmental Health and Audiology), Doernbecher Children's Hospital, Gales Creek Camp, March of Dimes, Providence Child Center, Randall Children's Hospital at Legacy Emanuel, Shriners Hospitals for Children Portland, Special Olympics Oregon, and Wheel to Walk Foundation.

U.S. Bank serves more than 300 labor-management groups with combined assets of \$37.3 billion.

"The Oregon-Columbia Chapter of NECA is proud to partner with U.S. Bank," said Tim Gauthier, executive manager of NECA and president of the BULL Session.

"U.S. Bank is proud to support such a worthy cause," said Jeff Kerr, president of U.S. Bank Institutional Trust and Custody. "This is a natural partnership for our organization and reinforces our dedication to labor management plans."

## **Columbia Pacific BTC heading to the 'Couve**

Delegates to the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council will hold their fourth meeting each month in Vancouver, Wash.



Delegates currently meet every Tuesday at Kirkland Union Manor in Southeast Portland.

Beginning Tuesday, Feb. 26, delegates will meet at 1:30 p.m. at Laborers Local 335 hall, 2212 NE Andresen Road, Vancouver.


"The new location and time will allow a greater participation to a few important local governmental meetings," said Executive Secretary Jodi Guetzloe Parker.

The Port of Vancouver begins its bi weekly meetings on the second and fourth Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. at the Port offices located at 3103 NW Lower River Road. And Clark County Commissioners meet on most Tuesdays at 10 a.m. at the Public Service Center, 1300 Franklin St.

"Both meetings are equally important, and deserve our attention. With the move, we can have a viable presence in these rooms, create relationships, and report potential jobs that can impact our affiliates, just to name a few of the opportunities," Guetzloe Parker said.

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