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Will Portland be next?

Seattle gets ready to pass fair scheduling law

By Don McIntosh
Associate editor

Seattle City Council is moving forward with a major workers rights reform — requiring big chain retail and food franchises to adopt more humane scheduling policies.

Sponsored by Mayor Ed Murray and backed by a labor-community coalition, the proposed ordinance would apply to retail and food service establishments with more than 500 employees worldwide. Those businesses would be required to give workers two weeks notices of schedules. After a schedule is posted, workers could voluntarily agree to changes, but any mandatory changes would require payment of “predictability pay” of one hour’s wages. Employers would have to provide a good faith estimate of expected hours when a worker is hired. And they’d be required to give current employees notice of new, additional hours available — before hiring additional staff. The ordinance would also crack down on the practice of “clopening” — workers would

have to be given at least 10 hours of rest between late-night closing and early-morning opening shifts. And workers would be entitled to half-time pay for any shift they are required to be on-call but don’t get called into work.

The ordinance is a response to increasingly unpredictable schedules at retail and restaurant chains. Firms are using computer software to predict customer volume based on things like weather forecasts, and then making last-minute schedule changes — or requiring workers to be “on-call.” Such practices trim labor costs by dumping business risk onto workers.

A study commissioned by Seattle City Council found that scheduling practices like those are creating financial hardships for Seattle workers and interfering with parenting responsibilities. Workers at giant national chains often don’t know their schedule from one week to the next, and suffer from unreliable incomes.

Backers of the ordinance are aiming for final passage by the end of September. San Fran-

cisco passed a similar piece of legislation, known as the Retail Workers Bill of Rights, in 2014.

Could Portland be next? Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick says he wants to pass a fair scheduling ordinance like Seattle’s, but he may have to wait until next July, because last year the Oregon Legislature temporarily barred local jurisdictions from passing scheduling ordinances. The moratorium was conceived by State Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) as part of a compromise to get votes for the Oregon paid sick leave law from Sen. Chris Edwards (D-Eugene) and other corporate Democrats in the Senate.

The good news, Dembrow says, is that the moratorium gave the Legislature more time to craft a good statewide policy. Dembrow has been co-chairing a legislative work group on scheduling, along with state Rep. Paul Holvey (D-Eugene). Initially, the work group included representatives of big business groups as well as labor and other stakeholders. But Associated Oregon Industries vice

president Betsy Earls emailed Dembrow and Holvey on June 1 to announce that she and her counterparts at five other business groups were withdrawing from the work group and that they’ll pursue an extension of the Legislature’s moratorium on local scheduling ordinances.

Undeterred, Dembrow said the work group has continued to meet and will issue recommendations later this year — probably something resembling the Seattle ordinance.

“I want to see us pass something at the Legislature,” Dembrow said. “This is clearly a statewide problem, not a Portland or Eugene problem.”

IN MEMORIAM

David Surridge

Oct. 4, 1961 - Aug. 27, 2016

David Surridge, a union sales account manager for Bright Now Dental, and a familiar face at union events, died Aug. 27. He was 54.



Surridge graduated from Franklin High School in Portland. He attended Mt. Hood Community College and Portland State University.

Prior to joining Bright Now Dental in 2014, Surridge worked as a sales rep for Access Dental.

“Access was the first competitor we encountered in this market, which put me in a position to not like Dave right out of the gate,” said Rob Etulain, national sales director for Smile Branks Inc, which operates Bright Now Dental. “It didn’t take long for me to see that Dave was the kindest, most humble and ethical individual you would ever want to compete with.”

Surridge is survived by his father, two sisters, and a brother. No service will be held.

CORRECTION

In the Sept. 2 issue, the article “You Saved My Town” incorrectly reported that Google had a data center in Prineville, Oregon. Facebook and Apple have large data centers in Prineville, as was reported. Google’s large data center is in The Dalles, Oregon.

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