

Earned sick time is good for Portland

Lisa Frack is the communications director with Everybody Benefits Coalition for Paid Sick Days, a coalition of parents, employers, caregivers, and activists who are working together to create workplace and public policies that work for Oregon families.

BY LISA FRACK
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

A concerned coalition of Portlanders is calling on city hall to solve a community problem with a simple solution that benefits everyone involved: allow all workers in the city to earn paid sick time while working. And they're listening! Commissioner Amanda Fritz proposed a policy and held a public hearing in late January; a second hearing and vote are scheduled for late February and early March.

Currently, two of every five private-sector workers in the Portland area don't earn any paid sick time at work, not a single hour! That number jumps to four in five nationally when looking only at low-wage earners — the people who can least afford to take unpaid time off from work when sick. This isn't the case around the world, though: More than 145 countries have paid sick days policies. And it shouldn't be the case at home, either. But in the absence of national and state leadership on this issue, cities across the nation, like Portland, are taking action to enhance local working conditions and improve public health.

For too many Portland families, taking a child to the doctor or staying home with the flu means losing needed pay — or even a job. Earning sick days can ensure that workers don't have to risk their financial security to do what's right for their own health and the wellbeing of our workplaces, schools, and communities. And since offering paid sick days is a proven net positive for employers, it's a clear win-win. Right now, when our families are struggling financially and living-wage work can be so hard to find, a workplace policy like this can really go a long way to improve economic security among families. It gives a lot for a little.

Many local employers already support such a policy because it reduces turnover and health care costs when workers have paid time to stay home when sick, customers are safer and more confident, co-workers stay healthier, and productivity and morale are higher. The direct, near-

term, costs are small and are outweighed by the longer-term payoff that comes with a healthy, committed, productive workforce. And they know that a successful business can — and should — focus on more than one bottom line.

Numerous studies show the positive impact that paid sick days have on businesses and the economy. While many of our local employers are already providing their employees with paid sick time off, the truth is that many aren't, especially in low-wage service industry jobs like food service, lodging, home health care, and child care, which is why a citywide policy should be a priority. Without one, there's too much preventable inequity and contagion that adversely affects our community. That's really important in the places where people prepare and serve food. It's shocking that 81 percent of Portland area food service workers don't earn a single paid sick day, especially when you consider that many norovirus outbreaks (like the one at the Portland Zoo in December) can be attributed to sick food handlers (the norovirus is in the vomit and stool of infected people).

Local restaurant owner Ben Meyer of Grain & Gristle in NE Portland explains why their staff earn paid sick time: "My people are my most important asset and the first line of contact with my customers. Making it possible for them to stay home when sick will build morale, reduce turnover, and keep people healthy and working. My customers deserve to be cooked for and waited on by healthy people. I support an earned sick days requirement in Portland. It should be a basic right, and now it's not."

The Portland City Council is on the right track to ensure that all Portland workers can earn a reasonable amount of paid sick time while they work. They should pass a strong earned sick time policy right away. We'll all benefit when they do, and it could spur a statewide policy that benefits even more Oregonians.

Learn more: www.everybodybenefitspdx.org

Golden Prayer of Surrender

By Echo Logic

Delicate vessels, how tranquil these sweet moments
Wind; gratefully reminding us our old innocence
I surrender to water's flow, timeless as she is
Earthly wisdom, a way of timeless bliss

Enchanted beings, never forget the cell's workings
Ancient as the stars, connect these stories
Cosmos children, we're a dream and a dreamer united
Thinkers are but thoughts, many dimensions collided

You are belief, strong enough to solidify as real
A golden way may seldom come to make us feel
Liberty; blessed by the purpose of collective experience
I see through you, straight to our immortal essence

Eye seek not to touch your body, though near it
My intention's to touch your heart, your spirit
Your temple is for you to enjoy, may I say?
Let emotions flow; all distractions melt away
As you face the depth of your consciousness
All doubts fall away; finally you confess:
Love is how and why I am here to live
In silent prayer, we're here to give

Who was James Chasse?

"Alien Boy: The Life and Death of James Chasse" is a feature length documentary film about one man's struggle with schizophrenia and the extraordinary brutality that ended his life. It is the story of a city in denial that was forced to face the truth and learn, grow and change as a result. Alien Boy explores issues of impunity, police brutality, and mental illness.

Six years in the making, the film is debuting at 7 p.m., Feb. 15, at Cinema 21 as part of the Portland International Film Festival. It will run again at Cinema 21, Feb. 24-28.

Director Brian Lindstrom had this to say about the film:

"What draws me to documentary film is the opportunity to shed light on the hidden lives of people who have been dealt a hard hand in life and somehow find the strength to carry on.

"One such life was that of James Chasse, a man with schizophrenia who died in the custody of Portland police in 2006. My film examines his childhood, his intense involvement in the early Portland punk music scene as a writer, illustrator and musician (The Wipers wrote the song "Alien Boy" about him), his heartbreaking teenage onset of mental illness, and his brave efforts to avoid institutionalization and maintain his independence."

