

... And get plenty of rest

Taking a few lessons from Portland and Eugene, lawmakers in Salem intend to make paid sick days a statewide standard

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Anjeanette Brown lives in Portland and works in Gresham. For about a year, now, she's been a waitress for a local restaurant that is part of a chain, and has worked with the parent company for 10 years, off-and on.

Prior to taking her current position, Brown worked in construction for about three years. After suffering a personal injury during a weekend camping trip, she continued to report to work because she couldn't afford the time off, and her injury continued to get worse. She told Street Roots she still has problems related to it despite having changed jobs.

A single mother of three sons – ages 16, 15 and 9 – Brown also struggles to care for them when they become ill. Earlier this winter, when her youngest child got the flu, one of her older sons had to stay home from school and care from him, because his high school would excuse the absence, but her employer would not, and she couldn't afford to take the time away from her job.

Nearly half – 47 percent – of private-sector workers in Oregon don't have paid sick days, and 71 percent of low-wage earners (outside of Eugene and Portland) don't earn paid sick time on the job, according to data from the Institute for Women's Policy Research and released by Family Forward Oregon.

Nationwide, 16 percent of workers have reported being fired for taking time off to care for a sick family member or to cope with an illness or injury of their own, according to a 2010 survey by the National Opinion Research Center. Many more live in fear that they will be fired for missing work due to illness or injury, and the fear is more deeply felt in communities of color: 44 percent of white workers fear they will be fired for missing any work time, compared with 56 percent of Latino workers and 75 percent of African-American workers.

Family Forward – which was at the forefront of the successful campaigns to pass sick and safe protection in Portland and

Eugene – now has its sights on securing paid sick time for every worker in the state.

Sens. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, and Jessica Vega Peterson, D-Portland, plan to introduce a bill during the legislative session that would extend paid sick time statewide. It's a little more generous than the Portland ordinance, which came into effect January 2014, in that it allows workers to earn seven sick days every year instead of just five. The statewide effort also doesn't make exceptions based on the size of the company. The Portland law protects workers in companies with five employees or fewer from being fired due to lost time but does not require that they be compensated while they're gone. Eugene's law, passed last summer and effective next July, is similar to Portland's but covers everyone, regardless of the size of their employer.

The bill also expands the definition of

“family” to mean “related by blood or affinity.” The Portland ordinance uses a state-codified definition of family members: spouses (and same-sex domestic partners); biological, adoptive or foster parents or children; grandparents or grandchildren; parent-in-laws or people with whom employees have an “in loco parentis” relationship. The broadened definition would allow workers to take time off to care for nieces, nephews, siblings, unmarried partners or others they consider a part of their family.

Steiner Hayward told Street Roots one key feature of the bill is that it would create a single set of rules for businesses around the state so that employers with work sites in more than one city have a streamlined policy to work with.

“We think it's important and respectful to employers to only have to have them have



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