

SICK DAYS, from page 8

one set of rules," Steiner Hayward says. She says she hasn't heard anything directly from constituents about the current paid sick days ordinances — negative or positive — but Family Forward policy director Lili Hoag says people in Portland and Eugene who've had contact with her organization have expressed a "real sense of relief" at knowing they can take time off work if they need to.

But since talk of a state bill began two years ago (Steiner Hayward and Vega Peterson introduced a bill in 2013 that died), business associations have fought the effort. They say the Portland and Eugene bills have added additional expense and headaches for their member businesses, creating disproportionate problems for smaller organizations.

Steve McCoid, president and CEO of the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, says he hasn't had any calls regarding problems or complaints about the Portland or Eugene laws but doesn't think they're popular with member businesses.

"You can make anything work if someone forces you to do it," McCoid told Street Roots. "It doesn't mean they like it. It doesn't mean it works well."

In an office setting, if a worker calls in sick, he or she may return to a backlog of e-mail and work to do, but restaurant work is much more time-sensitive, he said: "You still need that server. You still need someone to be there."

Traditionally, service-industry businesses have addressed the short-term need by allowing employees to trade shifts with each other. He said now some businesses are probably paying double, because they have to cover wages for the absent employee and

they have to pay the one who comes in to work.

McCoid also said paid sick days may not even be a high-priority issue for workers themselves, citing a poll his organization conducted a few years ago among members. That survey asked business owners what they thought their employees wanted most from the workplace, and issues such as higher wages and health insurance ranked much higher on the list, he said. However, he clarified it was an informal online poll conducted through SurveyMonkey, with fewer than half of e-mail recipients responding, and also said he wasn't able to provide Street Roots with specifics from the survey.

Hoag said that nationally, workers with protected sick time take just 2.5 days per year, and the cost of having to cover pay for absent workers is negligible compared to the cost of high turnover, low productivity due to illness or community outbreaks that occur when workers come in sick and handle food.

"I don't want to impose undue burden on people, but I also think people have to be realistic about the fact that things change in business all the time," Steiner Hayward said. "I want to limit them in reasonable ways but I also want to make sure we're protecting workers. Frankly, I think it cannot be good for restaurateurs if you have an employee who comes in with some kind of gastroenteritis."

In addition to making sure the state continues to allow shift-trading, McCoid said his organization would like to see exceptions for part-time or seasonal workers, since employees hired to work only a short duration are unlikely to ever need time off.

"It's just more paperwork for somebody who's still not going to be there by year's

end," McCoid said.

"Oregon's an awfully progressive state. There's a lot of things they think people ought to have. When you say something like this, they think big business. They think they can afford it. There's an impact there that's much higher in relation to a multimillion-dollar company. When they look at this stuff, that's what they think of. They forget over 90 percent of the businesses in Oregon are small businesses by definition," McCoid said, meaning they employ 50 people or fewer. "It's not harming anybody but your local neighborhood."

Tracking the hours earned may provide an additional expense, McCoid said, whether done in-house or through a payroll service.

"Keeping track of it has been easy, because it's just the payroll company that does it," said Bryan Steelman, owner of Por Que No, a Portland Mexican restaurant with two locations and 60 employees. "I don't know anyone who does their own payroll. I did my own payroll for six months and I was like, 'It's going to get me in trouble.'"

Stelman supported the Portland campaign for paid sick days after learning about it through the Main Street Alliance, another business association that leans farther left than some of its counterpart groups. Steelman also said he's raising employees' starting wages to \$15 an hour and supports a minimum wage increase.

He declined to comment on the double pay issue raised by ORLA, but said he feels offering sick and safe time to workers has increased the "confidence and pep" of his crew, and the morale boost was worth the investment.

"I try to have a really awesome benefit structure. We try not to have any turnover," Steelman said. "If people feel taken care of and some security, and that they're being

acknowledged for what they do and respected, it means so much. You cannot put a value on what that means for your business."

Since the Portland law went into effect, the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry has received 111 complaints about employers not complying with the law. Most employers have been warned, but four are still under investigation, according to data shared by BOLI spokesman Charlie Burr.

Erin, who asked that her first name only be used for this story, has been working for the same small retailer in Portland for more than four years. Eight years ago she was diagnosed with a chronic health condition that made it difficult to come to work, and frequently came to work sick, though she often wasn't happy with the quality of her work on the days when she had to push through.

Erin told Street Roots that because she lives "paycheck to paycheck" and has no savings, during times when she absolutely had to miss work due to illness, she sometimes had to ask family or friends to help her cover her rent and expenses.

"I'm blessed to have family that can help me. It's slightly shameful to have to ask your mom to help you pay your rent because you got sick and couldn't work. I've had to ask for help and I've always received it from my family," Erin said.

Since Portland's ordinance went into effect a year ago, Erin has taken only one day, but said it's been a massive relief to know she can.

"Being sick is hard enough. To put the pressure of having to go to work to make your ends meet is harder. It's just a blessing to know if I need the time, I can take it."

Waiting for you to Hear

by Ron Sanford

Why are you here? Where are you from?
 When were you born? Who is my self?
 How? You ask first...how am I now?
 Always question, no matter what
 Authority that is unjust
 How can we treat and rectify
 Mistakes from our wretched past
 Don't you use a piece of paper
 Let the MRI tell the tale...
 Words that can be twisted
 You are alone and poor
 You told the tale before
 But nobody listened
 So now you are ahead
 With lawyer and doctor
 It proved that you were right
 And those lies you exposed
 There's nothing in the dark
 That won't come to light
 And, no, I'm not gloating
 Waiting for you to hear



Dignity



Poverty

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