

July 13, 2011

Dear Members of the Workforce and Labor Development Committee,

My name is Toba Spitzer, of Congregation Dorshei Tzedek in West Newton, Massachusetts. I am the Rabbi of this congregation, and a member of the Executive Board of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis. I am writing in favor of "An Act Establishing Paid Sick Days" (S00930 and H01398).

The issue of Paid Sick Days is multifaceted, involving public health, individual wellness, family health, work and life balance, and more. This bill is wide-reaching, touching the lives of over 1 million Massachusetts residents who currently do not have this benefit, with the intent of helping to create adequate time for healing and wellness that is otherwise denied them. It would positively impact the financial stability of the State by ensuring that workers are capable of working efficiently, and it would help alleviate stress on our emergency medical services.

But this bill also touches on a moral issue. In the Jewish tradition, the preservation of human life is a value that trumps all others. Individuals are responsible for caring for their own health, and society is responsible for allowing individuals to do so. This involves obligations by employers as well as by the government. It is simply immoral for an individual to have to choose between his or her own health needs and the threat of losing their job or needed income. Yet without paid sick leave, this is precisely what happens to too many of our citizens.

As a congregational rabbi, I have unfortunately seen too often the consequences of serious illness for members of my community. Those with the means, or with understanding employers, are able to tend to their own and their family's health needs without sacrificing their employment or income. Others have not had what too often amounts to a privilege, and have had to return to work even when they are not ready.

It is the belief of the faith community of Massachusetts that we are all entitled to time for rest, recuperation, and family care. This bill will see to it that values that we hold dearly and that guide our lives are made into law and that this fundamental human right is available to all persons. Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, I urge you to move this bill forward and to help extend the right to health and wellness to all people in Massachusetts.

With Regards,

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