

**Mass. Paid Leave Coalition
State House Hearing
July 14, 2011**

My name is Rob Everts and I am the Co-President and CEO of Equal Exchange.

I am really pleased to join you all here today. Equal Exchange, which was founded in a drafty warehouse in the South End in 1986, is now a business that employs 110 people and has sales of about \$40 million. We import, roast and then wholesale 6 million lbs of organic, fair trade coffee every year from family farmers and their cooperatives around the world. We also import and sell tea, chocolate and olive oil on similar terms.

We are in full support of paid sick days legislation. Our employees earn 12 sick days a year that can be used, in addition to staying home from work while sick, to take care of a sick child, spouse, or parent and can be used for medical appointments. Importantly, this policy has been in place since we were a very small company back in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

The policy has been a plus for Equal Exchange at many levels. Presenteeism is a real issue for the workplace. We don't want people coming in and getting others sick and being unproductive. Likewise, if your kids are sick you don't want to be stuck without any options. At a minimum you will be highly distracted.

We are a business first and foremost and we have a bottom line. We don't see a conflict between doing the right thing and earning a profit. We value our workers for the skills they bring and at the same time recognize that they are human beings with human needs.

At a very personal level, I benefited from this policy. A few years ago when my father was dying, I was able to spend the last several days at his bedside, a time I will remember vividly for the rest of my life and for which I am grateful to my company for eliminating another source of worry at an already stressful time.

We believe that businesses have an obligation to be a positive contributor to the community that goes beyond providing jobs. It includes providing a humane and safe workplace. We have never regretted our policy and feel that it has contributed to our growth, profitability and high retention rate of employees.

Massachusetts has pioneered many far-sighted initiatives over the years. We can have policies that respect our workforce and provide standards like this that put all businesses on an equal footing. It's right, it's fair, and it will help maintain a stable and productive workforce throughout the state.

Rob Everts
Co-President & CEO
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