

MNA

MASSACHUSETTS NURSES ASSOCIATION

Memo

TO: Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
FROM: Tami Hale, RN
DATE: July 14, 2011
RE: HB 1398/SB 930, An Act Establishing Paid Sick Days

My name is Tami Hale, and I live in Worcester, MA. I am a school nurse at the Gates Lane Elementary School in the Worcester Public Schools, and I am a member of the Massachusetts Nurses Association. On behalf of the 23,000 members of the MNA, I am here in support of HB 1398/SB 930, An Act Establishing Paid Sick Days (Khan/Jehlen).

As a school nurse, I deal with children with an incredibly wide variety of health problems, from the simplest day-to-day childhood complaint through very complex, chronic health problems. When a child comes to see me during the school day, my goal is to provide that child with good care and, if possible, return that child to the classroom. Most of the time, I am successful. In fact, when Massachusetts students have adequate access to school nursing services, they return to the classroom over 90% of the time.¹

But sometimes a child must go home, because they're too sick to be in a classroom and usually because they're contagious. That's where I see the problem of parents with no paid sick days at work so clearly. We talk to parents at the beginning of the year about not sending their child to school sick, particularly with a fever. We explain that it not only affects their child, but if their child is contagious it will end up affecting other parents, who also have to juggle work and family. But every year parents send their children to school sick because they just don't have any other options. The parents simply can't miss work because they can't lose the pay, or they fear they'll get fired if they stay home to care for their child. These are parents in impossible situations, and they are, in turn, forced to put others — their child, me, other children, and other parents — in equally impossible situations.

The problem then becomes compounded if the family has more than one child, which most families do. The illness is passed from one child to the next, with the family facing multiple days in quick succession of sick children. Without paid sick time, this situation is just unmanageable for families, and unmanageable for schools.

I have a nine year old and a 19 year old myself. When my youngest son is sick, I have

¹ Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Essential School Health Services Program Data Report, 2008-2009 School Year.

the benefit of paid sick time to stay home and care for him. When my older child was little, I worked in a hospital, and again, I had paid sick time I could use to stay home and care for him when he got sick. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have that benefit. I guess I would be in the same situation as the parents I deal with, and I would probably be forced to make some of the same bad choices.

I encourage the committee to support this bill, It's good for parents, it's good for schools, and most of all, it's good for children. Should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Andi Mullin at the MNA at 781/830-5716. Thank you for your time.