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Pro And Con: Proposed Sick-leave Mandate Divides Madison

Pro: For Justice, Fairness, And Equality

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As a diverse group of clergy, we urge the City Council to pass the Healthy Families, Healthy City Ordinance, which would provide a modest amount of paid sick leave for working people in Madison.

Members of our communities are both workers and business owners. We are keenly aware of the political and economic issues at stake. However, our commitment to the religious values of justice, fairness and equality compel us to embrace this ordinance.

Passing the sick leave ordinance is a moral issue. This ordinance is about real people's lives. These are people who care for our children, our parents, and people with disabilities; who put food on our tables so we can dine out; who clean our hotels when we entertain guests; who stock supermarket shelves so we can buy food.

And because they do not have paid sick leave, they are not able to properly care for their own families. They are forced to decide whether to work when they are sick or risk losing their jobs. They are forced to decide whether to leave their sick children at home by themselves or not have enough money to pay their rent.

This is a disgrace.

Paid sick leave is not a luxury. For many of our congregants, it is a question of keeping a job, of feeding hungry children and of paying the rent.

Opponents of this ordinance have attempted to scare us into believing that if sick leave is provided, Madison businesses will suffer an enormous loss. This is simply not true. The actual cost of paid sick leave is quite minimal.

Moreover, paid sick leave would reduce health care expenditures, prevent the spread of illnesses to co-workers and customers and allow employees to recover faster and be more productive. Companies would also benefit from lower turnover.

We understand that this may present a challenge for some businesses. However, we ask business owners to consider the greater issues at stake: If we do not pass this ordinance, we will be telling our city's low-wage workers that their health and well-being is of little value.

We will be telling them that preventing a small increase in cost to businesses is more important than ensuring that they can provide for their children. We will be telling them that our rhetoric of justice, fairness, and equality has little substance.