

Paid sick leave's healthy returns

Benefit offers bottom-line boost, say business owners in Jersey City and Newark

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Business groups are up in arms over mandatory paid sick leave proposals, like the kind made law in Jersey City and proposed in Newark and the state capital.

Phillip Stamborski doesn't see what all the fuss is about.



Phillip Stamborski in his Newark Avenue framing shop. Paid sick leave has improved productivity and lowered turnover at Gallerie Hudson.

Granted, with only two employees plus himself, Stamborski's Gallerie Hudson framing shop falls below the 10-worker minimum established in Jersey City's law. But he still offers his employees paid sick time nonetheless.

“If you take care of your employees, they'll take care of you,” Stamborski said.

Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop made Jersey City the first New Jersey municipality to require paid sick leave when he signed such a measure into law last week. On the heels of that, Newark announced a plan to pursue such an ordinance, too.

Central to the plan for both cities is that for workers employed in a business with 10 or more employees, every 30 hours worked equals one hour of paid sick time, with a cap at 40 hours per year.

There may be a cost, Stamborski said, but the employee benefit has helped his bottom line, which has improved productivity and lowered turnover.

For instance, Stamborski said, the lead time on a typical custom frame order is around 10 days at his current staffing level. But with only a handful of employees, one loss would require extended hours of training and hands-on supervision for any replacement. Bringing on a new hire, he said, would mean orders would be filled in weeks, not days.

Less custom frame orders going in and out translate into fewer customers, plain and simple.

“If you have a constant revolving door ... you're always focused on that, and you're not focusing on your business,” Stamborski said.

But that's not the only reason Stamborski has offered his employees paid sick leave since opening his shop approximately a decade ago. Especially with such a small operation, forcing one sick worker to come in could shut his business altogether if an illness were to spread.

“From purely a productivity point of view, forcing someone to come to work just doesn't make any sense,” Stamborski said.

With the ink still drying on Jersey City's ordinance and wide support expected for Newark's, business groups are preparing their stand in Trenton, where a similar measure was introduced last spring.

But Stamborski said he's unnerved by the position taken by industry groups, saying investing a little more into a valued, skilled worker is worth the risk of being without one altogether.

“When you find a good employee, you hang on to them because they're hard to find,” Stamborski said.

Paid sick leave also won't be crippling to Helen's Pizza, in Jersey City, said its owner, Steven Kalcanides. He already offers paid sick leave to his 10 or so employees.

“I don't see it as being the straw that breaks the camel's back on a business,” Kalcanides said at the bill signing, which took place at his restaurant.

Holly Kaplansky, owner of Newark-based printing company Minuteman Press, said she understands where opponents of mandatory paid sick-leave are coming from, but notes that through her own practice of offering it, she's managed to retain workers and stay competitive.

“As a small-business owner, my most valuable resource is my people,” Kaplansky said. “And their health and their well-being is definitely my concern.”

Her business has also seen increased productivity as a result of paid time off, she said. From that aspect, Kaplansky said, an employer who doesn't see the long-term benefit to his or her bottom line is caught in a “penny-wise, dollar-foolish” mindset.

“Would you work harder for someone who didn't care about you?” she said.

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