



N.J. Democratic lawmakers, advocates push for employer-paid sick leave

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N.J. state Sen. Loretta Weinberg, D-Teaneck.

Requiring employers to offer all their workers paid sick leave is a matter of “family values,” Democratic lawmakers and worker advocates argued at a State House news conference today.

The benefit allows parents to take care of ill children, or to stay home sick themselves and avoid spreading germs to coworkers and customers, the lawmakers said.

They’re pushing for legislation, which has yet to advance in the Assembly or the Senate, that would require employers to offer their workers one hour of paid sick leave for every

30 hours worked. Employees at small companies could get up to 30 hours of paid time off under the bill; those at larger employers could get as much as 72 hours off.

“This is what family values is about,” said state Sen. Loretta Weinberg, D-Teaneck, one of the bill’s sponsors. “It’s the ability, when you’re really sick, you can stay home for a couple days and not lose a day’s pay.”

New Jersey has 1.1 million workers who do not get any paid sick days, according to Analilia Mejia, executive director of the Working Families Alliance. For those people, “getting fired can be as easy as catching the flu,” she said.

The measure’s Assembly sponsor, Pamela Lampitt, D-Camden, said the bill is also important for public health. The Port Authority employees who clean planes at Newark Airport don’t get paid sick leave, she said, and risk spreading illnesses to passengers.

But many business groups oppose the requirement, arguing it would increase expenses for New Jersey companies, ultimately leading to higher prices and fewer jobs.

“If lower-paid employees are so disadvantaged they feel they must work through sickness rather than miss a paycheck, the solution is not forcing their employers to provide paid sick leave – a move that will hurt the employer, employee and consumer alike,” the Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce, a collective of businesses in North and Central Jersey and New York City, said in a policy statement. “Rather, the solution is better education and training.”

Advocates at Tuesday’s news conference disagreed.

Anita Thomas, who runs a dance company with an annual budget of about \$700,000, said she thinks it’s important to give her workers paid sick leave.

“I’m standing here to shame businesses, particularly big businesses, who have a ton of money ... who are trying to bar giving employees their basic rights,” she said.

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