

Proposed Albuquerque Sick Leave Bill Would Benefit Few Workers

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ALBUQUERQUE—A coalition of workers and policy advocates said today that the earned sick days bill introduced by City Councilors Ken Sanchez and Don Harris would leave thousands of employees unable to earn paid time off to care for themselves.

“This bill would still force thousands of working families in Albuquerque to choose between taking earned time off to get well or care for a sick family member and a much needed paycheck earn,” said Veronica Serrano, a member of the Healthy Workforce coalition. “I couldn’t earn sick leave at my most recent job, and this bill would do nothing to change that because any business with fewer than 50 employees won’t have to offer earned sick time--that’s 90 to 95 percent of all employers in Albuquerque.”

The coalition noted that the proposal also doesn't cover employees who work fewer than 20 hours. “This bill would actually encourage employers to offer fewer hours to their workers,” said Ms. Serrano. “That’s not healthy for our communities.”

According to the New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, the law would be the weakest sick leave bill in the country. “In cities and states around the country they’ve passed much stronger laws and experienced economic growth, not to mention healthier and safer communities. The big difference is virtually every other law allows employees to earn an hour of paid time off for every 30 hours they work,” said Elizabeth Wagoner, an attorney at the Center. “This proposal is much weaker. Employees would only accrue an hour of time off for every 40 hours worked. It would also exclude many families in Albuquerque by using a narrow definition of family members that an employee can care for, using their earned sick time.”

The bill’s enforcement provision would also be costly for the City and ineffective, as well.

Despite their misgivings about the proposed ordinance, coalition members said they are ready to work on improving it. “We’d be happy to talk with Councilors Sanchez and Harris about ways the bill could be improved to meet the needs of all Albuquerque employees and businesses,” said Ms. Wagoner.