



Mandatory Sick Leave plan fails to gain approval

Proponents of ordinance considering options, vow to continue fighting

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Last August, a coalition of labor, housing and religious interests created a buzz, working on a proposal that would require mandatory sick leave benefits for all workers within the City of Madison.

The key players in the initiative found allies within the Common Council. Several alders, including Council President Austin King and Alderwoman Brenda Konkel, proposed an ordinance requiring sick leave benefits for all Madison businesses with five or more full-time employees.

The proposed ordinance would provide a minimum of nine days' paid sick leave per year to all employees working at least 18 hours per week after they have been with their employer for 90 days. Exempted would

be state employees, county employees and UW-Madison employees, as well as construction workers, members of workplace cooperatives and employees compensated solely by commissions.

Proponents of the measure praised it as a way to ensure that workers with families had the sick leave they need to care for ill family members. Opponents said the burden of providing paid sick leave would be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back for many businesses. Ultimately, it failed on a 10-9 vote.

Vicky Selkove from the Healthy Families, Healthy Cities Coalition said she places the blame for the proposal's demise squarely on the shoulders of Madison Aldermen. She claims the council is "out of touch with what most Madison residents want," and the Common Council "succumbed to the Chamber's big-money politics instead of listening to what their districts and constituents told them."

Michael Quigley, director of the Madison-

based Common Sense Coalition, was pleased with the results. He said measures such as mandatory sick leave, a higher minimum wage and the recent smoking ban also contribute to preventing Madison businesses from competing with businesses just minutes away.

"We support sick leave and see the value of that as a benefit. We don't want people coming to work sick," Delora Newton of the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce said. "However, this mandated a one-size-fits-all benefit. Businesses should have the ability to make decisions about the benefits they offer based on what they can afford to offer their employees and based on what benefits their employees say they need or are most valuable."

If the proposal goes to referendum, Newton said the Chamber will launch some form of public education or awareness campaign to continue its fight against mandated sick leave. However, Selkove isn't sure if the pro-

posal will go to referendum.

"We are still considering options. The coalition hasn't decided what direction we are going to take," she said. "One thing is for sure, though, we are not going away. The issue is not dead and we fully intend to press on to get paid sick leave for Madison's workers."

George Twigg, spokesman for Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, said the mayor didn't support the sick-leave mandate initiative. He implied the mayor was concerned the business community in Madison is still reeling from attempts to raise the minimum wage, inclusionary zoning and a municipal smoking ban.

"The mayor didn't feel this was the proper time [for such a mandate]. The mayor is just not supportive of the proposal," he said. "The mayor is generally not supportive of referenda [either]. He feels city leaders should make the decisions and if the general public isn't happy with the decisions they're making it's up to [the public] to take it up with their elected officials."