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Seattle Business Community Responds to Paid Sick Leave Law



SEATTLE – Business organizations representing grocery, retailers, restaurants and other Seattle-based employers expressed concerns after Seattle City Council approved legislation mandating paid sick leave. These businesses support workers staying home when they are ill, however, they are concerned with how the new mandate will impact businesses and their employees.

“Businesses throughout the city tried to work with the proponents and councilmembers to draft language we could make workable in restaurants. Unfortunately, much of what we put on the table was rejected,” said Josh McDonald with the Seattle Restaurant Alliance. “The restaurant industry continues to struggle in this economy; this ordinance could make it even harder on them. We just don’t know.”

Of specific concern is the tiering of businesses within the new law. Small businesses will be required to provide only three days leave, but larger business will be mandated to provide up to nine. “If this is really about public health, why are we giving more leave to some workers, and less to others? Why not have all businesses be required to provide the same number of sick days to their employees?” said McDonald.

The Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, the Seattle Restaurant Alliance, the Northwest Grocery Association, and other local chambers and businesses attempted to modify the ordinance so they could provide sick leave in an affordable, workable way.

Holly Chisa, representing the Northwest Grocery Association, is concerned with the new law’s effect on employers currently providing a sick leave benefit to their employees. “Grocery stores already provide comprehensive sick leave to our employees, and health care coverage to see the doctor. This new ordinance will require additional benefits on top of what is already offered to our workers through the union contract. It’s going to hit grocers twice, even though they were already providing leave to their workers.”

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“In the rush to legislate, we have lost an opportunity to craft workable legislation that is fair to all and protects public health,” said George Allen, senior vice president of government relations for the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce. “Instead, we have a bureaucratic and costly mandate that is confusing to employers and employees. Plus, we know that when we mandate something, other benefits are taken away. There’s no credit for what employers are already doing to ensure the health of their employees and the public.”

Even as the Seattle City Council passed the ordinance today, businesses are committed to working with the Council to implement the new requirements and make changes as needed. All agreed, “We’re pleased to see that the Council did make some changes to the law to make it more manageable for businesses, but there is still work to do. We appreciate the inclusion of the review economic study so we can revisit this issue. Clearly there will need to be changes made to the law in the future as business learn what works and what doesn’t under the new mandate.”

The new law takes effect in 2012, but businesses are already working to determine next steps.

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About the Northwest Grocery Association

The Northwest Grocery Association represents grocers and food manufacturers throughout the Pacific Northwest.

About the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce

Founded in 1882, the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce is the largest and most diverse network of influential business leaders in the Puget Sound region. Our primary objective is to create and protect a competitive edge for businesses in Seattle and the region. Working on behalf of our nearly 2,200 members, we provide business leadership, serve as an advocate for business and provide business development resources. For more information, visit seattlechamber.com.

About the Washington Restaurant Association

The [Washington Restaurant Association](http://WashingtonRestaurantAssociation.com), in its 82nd year, is the leading business association for the restaurant industry – the largest private employer in the state with an average workforce of 191,000. In Washington, the more than 13,000 restaurants annually generate \$8.8 billion to the state economy.