

Paid Leave

WRA Position: Oppose legislation that would require employers to offer paid sick leave or other mandatory leave.

Suggested Talking Points:

It's against policy and the State Food Code to allow a sick employee to handle or serve food.

It is not in the restaurant's best interest to allow sick employees in the restaurant—perception is a big part of customer satisfaction. One foodborne illness can cause a restaurant to close its doors.

Restaurant workers have a great deal of flexibility with their schedule. It is very common for restaurant workers to switch shifts with other employees to address unplanned absences. As a result, most restaurant workers will not lose hours.

Requiring employers to offer paid leave is burdensome to small business, because many would struggle greatly to afford this benefit expansion.

Background: Several lawmakers will advance legislation to require employers to offer paid sick leave. These same lawmakers cite the H1N1 virus as the reason such policies are needed. Lawmakers held an interim hearing in Dec. 2009, and requested the participation of various food and health care industry representatives, including the WRA. The hearing attempted to underscore that sick employees are showing up at work and contaminating customers, hence the need for paid sick leave to ensure that sick employees can afford to stay home.

Other proposals continue to surface that would require employers to allow paid leave for an employee needing to stay home with a sick family member, and other similar scenarios.

Congress is also considering the Healthy Families Act, which requires employers with 15 or more employees to offer paid sick leave.