



Sherrod Brown seeks mandatory private sector sick leave

Tom Jackson
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U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown says paid sick leave should be mandatory for all private businesses with 15 or more employees.

The senator, noting that President Barack Obama has put the issue back in the news, talked to reporters Wednesday to plug the Healthy Family Act, legislation he supports that would impose the federal mandate.

The president issued an executive order Monday requiring all federal contractors to provide sick leave to their employees. Brown's office said the order will apply to more than 300,000 federal contractors.

Brown says the measure he supports would give workers up to seven days of paid sick time, both for themselves and to take care of family members, such as a sick child. Employers that already have leave policies could keep them in place. Employees taking more than three days off for sick time would have to provide documentation that it was necessary.

Brown said that sick leave is a fairness issue. People who have to choose between earning a living and taking care of an illness are put in an impossible situation, he said.

"Ohioans should not have to choose between a paycheck and their health, or the health of a child," Brown said.

Brown's guest during his telephone conference call with reporters, Columbus restaurant worker Nick Pasquarello, said sick leave also is a public health issue.

Pasquarello said that when he's tried to call in sick, he's been told "to suck it up, I need to come in, I need to work."

"I work around food," Pasquarello noted.

According to a 2012 blog post at the federal Centers for Disease Control website, sick leave also likely reduces on-the-job injuries.

The blog post, citing a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health study, said that workers with access to sick leave were 28 percent less likely to suffer injuries.

"Access to paid sick leave might reduce the pressure to work while sick out of fear of losing income. Fewer people working while sick, and therefore performing at reduced functional capacity, might lead to safer operations and fewer injuries," the article said.

Opposition to Brown's proposal seems to be based on opposing federal mandates on private business.

Mark Calabria, director of financial regulation studies at the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., debated against mandatory sick leave during a TV appearance in 2013 on the Fox Business Network's "Money With Melissa Francis."

"I think this has got to be the discretion of the employer," he said. "The real question is not whether a business offers sick leave or not. It's whether it's forced to offer sick leave or not.

As a general philosophical matter, I'm simply against the government getting in the middle of voluntary contracts between consenting adults," he said.