

January 30, 2006

**Testimony for HB 2777 to Establish Paid Sick Leave
by Lynn B. Wirta, Executive Director, Small Faces Child Development Center**

Thank you for holding hearings today on this important topic. I'm Lynn Wirta, Executive Director of Small Faces Child Development Center in Seattle.

For 25 years, I have operated a child care center that employs 25 paid teachers who work with 160 children each week. As the director of a small business that caters to the needs of working families, I can attest to the critical importance of paid sick leave.

Individuals who come to work sick because they cannot afford to lose a day's pay would spread disease not only to other workers but to the children as well. My state license requires me to meet strict teacher-to-child ratios. I've set up a system so that I always have qualified substitutes when needed.

As a child care center director, I have seen many parents struggle when their child is sick. Too many parents send their children to child care when the child should be at home. Why? Because those parents cannot afford losing a day's wages, and they also fear losing their jobs if they call in sick. At the center, I cannot have a sick child in the classroom. If a child is ill, I call the parents immediately. They must make arrangements to return to the center to pick up their child or to find a relative, friend, or neighbor who can do so.

Ten days of sick leave per year seems like a reasonable standard. With an illness like chicken pox, children must stay home for at least a week. Chronic conditions like asthma can also cause children to miss many days. For the health of the child, it is extremely important for the child to be cared for by their parents, whether at home or in the hospital.

My parents will tell that there are just too many employers who are unwilling to provide paid sick leave, that being sick themselves or caring for a sick child causes extreme stress in and of itself. Compounded with the fear of losing a job and the lack of much-needed income, the situation is untenable.

Paid sick leave is good public health policy by allowing parents to take care of their children when they are sick. Paid sick leave is good business policy. Parents who are worried and on the job are not productive employees, may cause accidents, and often spread disease in the workplace. Regrettably, too many employers ignore the costs of having an ill employee on the job. In my industry, that cannot happen.

If the critical need of child care in our community can be met while providing paid sick leave to the teachers in a small child care center like mine, then any industry can and must do the same.