

Testimony from Makini Howell for:

Senate Bill 6229 on January 24, 2012

House Bill 2508 on January 25, 2012

My name is Makini Howell. I am a small business owner. I have grown up in the family business that my parents started.

I run three restaurants and a commercial kitchen in Seattle. We employ 30 people.

I'm also a steering committee member of the Main Street Alliance of Washington – a coalition of more than 2,000 small business owners.

When the Paid Sick Days law passed in Seattle, I was part of a group of small business owners who worked with health care professionals, labor unions, advocates, and council members to develop the policy based on common ground principles.

Our principles were:

- No one should have to go to work sick.
- No one should fear losing income or their job when they are sick.
- It is important to support the success of small businesses.

I feel proud that local small business owners sat down at the table to help craft the law so that it works for our small businesses, our employees, and our communities.

Why is having a paid sick days standard good for small business?

The first reason is public health. I own restaurants. Simply put, I don't want our employees coming to work sick and handling your food.

All of us get sick from time to time. When my employees are sick, I don't want them thinking "Can I afford to take the time off? How am I going to pay rent?"

I know for me, the cost that I can't afford is losing good employees. I believe that investing in my most valuable asset – my employees – pays off.

And, I'm willing to spend a few pennies per meal to ensure that I'm not serving you H1N1 with your sweet-potato fries.

But, 78 percent of people working in the restaurant industry do not earn a single paid sick day. And I understand it can be hard for a restaurant owner to go out on a limb and provide sick days when it's not the industry standard. A Paid Sick Days law sets a level playing field.

Like a lot of small business owners, I have a management team of one: Myself. I do payroll, I pay our taxes, I manage the schedule, I handle HR. I'm also a chef, and I'm on my way to cook in the restaurant right after this.

The Seattle law offers a fair and flexible approach for small businesses, rather than a one-size-fits-all policy.

You'll probably hear doomsday predictions that the sky will fall from big business lobbyists. Well, I have a simple message for large corporations with huge HR teams and billion dollar revenues: if small businesses like me can do this, so can you.

Thanks for your time.

Makini Howell