

TESTIMONY: HB 4249

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Randy Block, Director

Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network

I am grateful to the House Committee on Commerce for providing an opportunity for the public to comment on HB 4249. My frame of reference for commenting on this legislation is both religious and practical. Currently, I serve as the Director of the Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network, a statewide network of Unitarian Universalist activists from 27 UU congregations. One of the moral principles of the Unitarian Universalist denomination is that all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Our Unitarian Universalist Service Committee has supported a movement to improve conditions for millions of restaurant workers who earn poverty wages yet may lack basic benefits like earned sick leave.

Within this religious framework, it is quite troubling that the legislation being considered today seeks to make it illegal to establish local policies that would enhance the provision of sick leave to workers, particularly women, who may caring for children or their elderly family members. This strikes me as an immoral law. From a very practical perspective, it runs counter to all of our self-interest when we provide incentives for people with infectious diseases to continue to serve us food in restaurants even though they may be sick and may pass their illness along to us.

In Michigan, there are more than 1.5 million workers - almost 46 percent of the state's private sector workforce - who are not able to take a paid sick day when they are ill. Sick leave should be available to used for the employees own health, for medical appointments, for preventive care or for caring for another member of the household. Women, who are most often the caregivers in families, are most critically in need of sick leave.

Last summer, the Unitarian Universalist Association voted to make Reproductive Justice its top issue for study and action during the next three years. In order for parents to be able to care for their children, it is essential that they not only have a good paying job, but also have access to paid sick leave. HB 4249 creates unjust barriers to Michigan workers who want to raise healthy, strong children and to Michigan citizens who want to contribute to their communities. My faith-based organization strongly opposes passage of HB 4249.