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Business owners, lawmakers champion bill for paid sick days

But some business groups say it puts unfair burden on bottom line

BY JOE PARZIALE / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Tuesday, March 13, 2012, 5:23 PM

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Supporters of paid sick leave legislation rallied on Tuesday in front of Terraza 7 Train Cafe in Elmhurst, Queens

Local small business owners and lawmakers rallied in Elmhurst on Tuesday in support of a City Council bill that would require businesses to provide workers with paid sick days.

Advocates argue it would have long-term economic benefits in addition to granting workers what they consider basic labor rights.

"When we protect the wages and job stability of workers, we also protect our consumers' ability to buy," said **Freddy Castiblanco**, owner of Terraza 7 Train Cafe, where the rally took place.

Some workers contend that employers who don't offer paid sick days often make them choose between their health and their jobs.

Rocio Loyola, a Mexican immigrant who has worked in restaurants since arriving in Queens eight months ago, said she put her job on the line when she took time off in the fall with a cold.

My boss "told me that if I didn't show up, I would be replaced," Loyola said through a translator. "This is the story of so many employees."

The main goal of the Paid Sick Days Act, according to **Councilwoman Gail Brewer (D-Manhattan)**, chief sponsor of the bill, would be to deter employers from making those kinds of threats.

"That kind of fear, that kind of unhealthy aspect should not exist in this city," Brewer said.

Councilwoman **Julissa Ferreras (D-East Elmhurst)** said the initiative was especially important for her district because there are so many small businesses there.



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The proposed legislation would require businesses with more than 20 employees to give nine days of paid sick leave a year and five days for employers with fewer than 20 workers.

Opponents say that would stunt hiring and place an unfair burden on businesses.

Other "morally imperative" benefits, such as unemployment and health insurance, require some cost-share mechanism, said **Jack Friedman** of the Queens Chamber of Commerce.

"This would be the first government-mandated benefit that would place all cost on the backs of small businesses," Friedman said. "It's going to hurt the same people it purports to help."

But **Lenin Juca**, owner of Oxium Copy and Print in Jackson Heights, said the chamber does not speak for him.

"Healthy employees are productive employees who will work with me to grow my business," Juca said.

Donna Dolan of the New York State Paid Leave Coalition, which has been pushing the legislation since 2009, noted that 62% of employers in the city have five or fewer workers, and they would be required to give sick days but without pay.

jparziale@nydailynews.com



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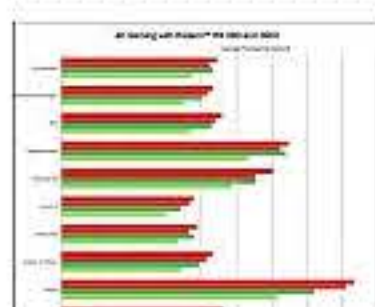
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