

TIME FOR ACTION: EDUCATING EMPLOYEES ABOUT THE MANDATED SICK LEAVE PROPOSAL

By Keith Lake, Director, Political and Candidate Education

At this point, it's a foregone conclusion that the mandated paid sick leave proposal – or “Healthy Families Act” as proponents deceptively call it – will be on the ballot this November. By the time you read this, petitions containing more than the necessary 120,000 signatures of registered voters will have been submitted to the Ohio secretary of state, and county boards of election will be in the middle of their efforts to verify these signatures.

Also by the time you read this, the official campaign committee to defeat the proposal, Ohioans to Protect Jobs and Fair Benefits, will have begun its efforts to educate all voters about the devastating effects the law would have on employers, employees and Ohio's economy. The campaign committee represents a broad coalition of employers and organizations, including the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

And make no mistake: this issue can be defeated. Supporters have the luxury of making a case that seems appealing at first glance: that personal or family illness merits time off without the loss of pay. But once voters hear about the unintended consequences of this proposal – specifically how it will cripple economic development at a time when our state already is suffering through its worst economic period in 20 years – its initial appeal will disappear quickly.

However, success at the polls will also require a united and organized business community willing to assist in carrying out an aggressive grassroots outreach effort and to help fund a comprehensive paid media campaign.

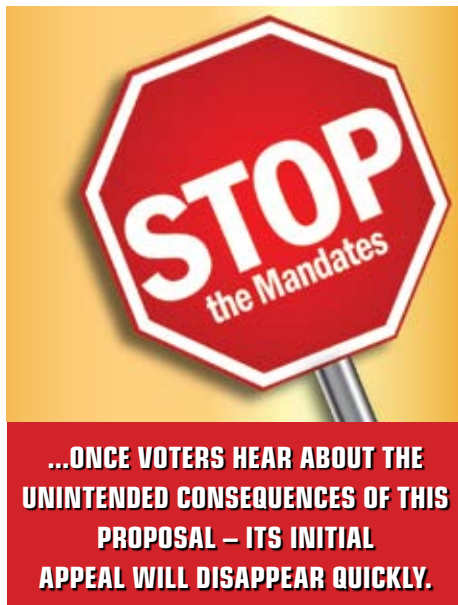
Every employer in Ohio will be impacted by this new state mandate. Thus, all have a stake in making certain our campaign to defeat it succeeds. The election is already less than three months away, and early voting begins on September 30. Now is the time for you to develop your company's strategy to support the campaign to defeat mandated sick leave. Your strategy should include:

1. TELLING YOUR EMPLOYEES ABOUT THE MANDATED SICK LEAVE PROPOSAL AND HOW IT WILL IMPACT YOUR BUSINESS.

This is perhaps the most effective thing you can do to make a difference in this campaign. Research suggests that employees find their employers to be among the most credible providers of information about issues and elections. Especially on an issue like mandated sick leave that so drastically interferes with the established relationship between employer and employees, employers have a unique opportunity to provide relevant and credible information to help educate your employees.

This must be done with sensitivity, however. There is every reason why employers and employees should reach the same conclusion about the merits of the mandated sick leave proposal, especially once employers explain the real ramifications of the proposal on the company and also the steps the employer may be forced to take in order to comply with the law should it pass. But employers must also guard against their concerns being perceived as a threat by employees.

In explaining their concerns, employers must



be certain to underscore how much the company values its relationship with employees and that they understand and support the objective of making sure employees can care for their own or a family member's illness. To illustrate this commitment to employees, it may also be helpful to review how the company already willingly provides an array of benefits designed to reward, attract, and retain valuable employees and help them improve their health and achieve a better work/life balance.

Further, discussing the issue with employees just a single time is not sufficient. In fact, a series of communications, beginning in August and culminating just prior to Election Day, would be most effective. These communications could be delivered via e-mail, as payroll envelope stuffers or directly from a human resource director or other executive at company-wide meetings. Here is a suggested timeline and a few possible themes:

LATE AUGUST. A message introducing employees to the proposal, providing a brief explanation of it, explaining it will be on the ballot, expressing initial concern about its impact on the company and announcing the company's plans to more thoroughly review it.

MID-SEPTEMBER. A message confirming the proposal will be on the ballot, providing its official ballot issue number, presenting a summary of the specific changes the proposal's passage would impose upon the employer. The summary could include the associated financial costs, compliance challenges, and productivity, staffing, and/or safety issues, as well as a menu of actual options the company would be forced to consider implementing in order to comply. Again, care must be taken to give employees a candid look at the genuine alternatives, not an unrealistic one that provokes unnecessary alarm. This message might also contain a statement about how much the company values its relationship with employees and a review of the many existing benefits currently provided by the company that

are designed to reward employees, enhance the employer-employee relationship or accommodate employee needs.

LATE SEPTEMBER. A message encouraging employees to participate in civic activities, vote and be educated voters, reminding them of the October 6 deadline to register to vote, reminding them that early voting begins on September 30 and providing links to downloadable voter registration forms and absentee ballot applications.

MID-OCTOBER. A message that speaks more broadly about the mandated sick leave proposal's negative impact on Ohio's overall economic competitiveness and incorporates themes outlined in an economic impact study due to be released in August.

LATE OCTOBER. A message reminding employees to vote on November 4, to review and consider the employer's earlier e-mails on the mandated sick leave proposal, and an invitation to make available an informed company executive to answer any questions an employee might have about the sick leave issue's impact.

2. SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT THE MANDATED SICK LEAVE PROPOSAL AND HOW IT WILL IMPACT YOUR BUSINESS TO YOUR CLIENTS, CUSTOMERS, SUPPLIERS, AND VENDORS.

Have your top executive send a personal letter to each of these constituencies. Your company is an important and trusted source of information to each of them, and to the extent you can demonstrate how an existing business relationship would be harmed or altered by this proposal, such a personal message will be far more persuasive than any message the campaign could send. Your appeal to other businesses among these groups might also include a suggestion that they take a more active role in helping defeat the issue, while your appeal to clients or customers who are individual voters might more closely resemble one of the communications to employees outlined above.

3. MAKING A FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO OHIOANS TO PROTECT JOBS AND FAIR BENEFITS.

Grassroots activity and financial support go hand-in-hand; both are necessary if we are going to succeed in defeating this issue in November. Ohioans to Protect Jobs and Fair Benefits is an official ballot issue political action committee that can legally accept contributions from corporations as well as individuals. You can make your check out to Ohioans to Protect Jobs and Fair Benefits and mail it to the committee, c/o the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 15159, Columbus, Ohio 43215-0159.

The Ohio Chamber is ready to assist you in preparing materials and a timeline for you to communicate with your employees or your clients, customers, suppliers and vendors. If you would like assistance, just send an e-mail to sickleave@ohiochamber.com with “Employee Communications Strategy” in the subject line, along with your contact information. Someone will be in touch to help you develop your approach.

To learn more about mandated sick leave and to sign up to receive our regular updates, visit OhioBusinessVotes.org.