MICHIGAN LEAGUE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Testimony Presented to the House Committee on Commerce and Trade HB 4052

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Good afternoon, Chairman Graves and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 4052. I am Gilda Jacobs, president and CEO of the Michigan League for Public Policy, a nonpartisan policy institute dedicated to economic opportunity for all. We believe that local communities should be able to pass ordinances and enact policies to help workers, and therefore we oppose House Bill 4052 which would prohibit local governments from passing a paid sick leave ordinance.

Most or all of us in this room work for employers that provide sick days or other kinds of paid leave. It is easy to take for granted that if we need to miss work due to illness or a sick child, we can do so without losing part of our wages. We might forget that most low-wage workers do not have this kind of flexibility to take care of themselves and their families. For them, a child missing two days of school due to the flu can mean having to pay a utility bill late or postpone purchasing a needed item. If they catch the flu themselves, they may feel they need to endanger their heath further by coming in to work anyway, and exposing their co-workers and in some cases even the public to their illness.

Nationwide, 39% of private sector workers do not get paid sick leave from their employers. Of workers in the lowest paying jobs, 70% do not have paid sick leave, while this is true of only 16% of workers in the highest paying jobs. We often talk about the dignity and the opportunity for economic improvement that comes with work, but when a job does not offer flexibility for family illness, it fails on that promise.

Michigan does not yet have a statewide paid sick or family leave law. However, a growing number of Michiganians are recognizing that such laws not only help workers succeed at and keep their jobs, but are good for public health. According to a recent poll by Denno-Research, 86% of Michigan voters agree that every worker should be able to earn paid sick days in order to take time off work without losing pay. None of us want to eat a restaurant meal prepared by a sick line cook or receive change handed to them by a sick cashier, nor do we want sick direct care workers tending to our loved ones. Nor do we want to see honest, hard-working people experience financial difficulty or endanger their health just because they become sick.

Many legislators, like many of you, served first in local government. I, too, was a city commissioner and a county commissioner before being elected to serve in the state legislature. I remember how livid both my Democratic and Republican colleagues were when the state passed legislation that inhibited our ability to do what we were elected to do.

If a county commission, township board or city council passes a paid sick leave ordinance, they do so because they believe it reflects the wishes of the people who elected them. We believe communities should be able to do what is best for their workers without a big-government, one size fits all prohibition handed down from Lansing. On the contrary, such endeavors should be honored and appreciated.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions.