



Maine Grocers &  
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IN OPPOSITION - LD 460 'An Act To Grant Sick Leave to Restaurant Employees Affected by COVID-19'

Dear Senator Daughtry, Chair, Representative Sylvester, Chair, and Members of the Labor and Housing Committee,

My name is Christine Cummings and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Grocers & Food Producers Association (MGFPA). MGFPA is a business trade association representing more than 200 businesses within Maine's food community; Main street businesses including independently owned and operated grocery stores and supermarkets, food and beverage producers and processors, manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and supportive service companies.

This bill creates inequity by requiring that restaurants are the only 'business type' that must provide up to 80 hours of paid sick leave to an employee affected by COVID-19. We also question what constitutes a restaurant as many grocers and convenience stores offer prepared food options. This is reminiscent of the committee discussion that attempted to expand the definition of 'essential worker'. It is complicated and problematic to segment front-line workers and to pit one industry against another, in particular when mandating paid sick leave benefits.

Current, US CDC guidelines note that if someone has been exposed, and is NOT up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccinations, they should quarantine for at least 5 days. While if someone has been exposed, and IS up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccinations, no quarantine is required. In addition, if someone has tested positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms, regardless of vaccination status they are advised to stay home for 5 days and isolate. 80 hours of paid sick leave is excessive in relation to the most recent US CDC guidelines, especially when paired with the state's earned paid leave law.

Food-away-from-home (restaurant purchases) CPI increased 0.7 percent in January 2022 and was 6.4 percent higher than January 2021; and while food-at-home (grocery store or supermarket food purchases) CPI increased 1.2 percent from December 2021 to January 2022 and was 7.4 percent higher than January 2021. In 2020-2021, \$96M in grant funding was distributed to the 'accommodations and food services' industry (of the \$273M total ME DECD recovery funds) demonstrating the financial strain on Maine's hospitality industry from the COVID pandemic. The food service industry is similarly grappling with significant operating cost increases while working to overcome the economic disruption of the pandemic. Mandating additional sick pay requirements in this volatile economy creates operating uncertainty and harms the sustainability of Maine's cherished and lauded restaurant businesses.

With the recent US and ME CDC recommendations to ease masking requirements and the decline in COVID rates this policy creates an unnecessary burden and contradicts the collaboration that lead to the state's earned leave program and stunts further economic recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

*Christine Cummings*

Christine Cummings  
Executive Director