

**Testimony in Support of LD 460, “An Act To Grant Sick Leave to Restaurant Employees Affected by COVID-19”**

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Good Morning, Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee Labor and Housing. My name is James Myall; I am an Economic Policy Analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I’m here today to testify in support of LD 460, “An Act To Grant Sick Leave to Restaurant Employees Affected by COVID-19”.

This bill would provide a critical support to front-line restaurant workers during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by offering them emergency paid sick time. While MECEP believes it is important for all Mainers to have access to paid sick leave, regardless of where they work, LD 460 will give protections to some of the most vulnerable Maine workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over. While cases have thankfully declined quickly over the past two months, we’re still seeing hundreds of Mainers infected with the disease each day. Even more are being asked to isolate because they’ve been exposed to a positive case. Huge numbers of parents are facing disruptions in day care or school arrangements. According to the most recent Census Bureau data, 29,000 Mainers are off work because they were caring for themselves or a close relative sick with COVID-19; another 28,000 are caring for a child not in school or daycare due to COVID.<sup>1</sup> That’s nearly one in ten workers in the state. And as we’ve seen recently, these numbers can increase dramatically with the emergence of new variants of the virus.

LD 460 would offer restaurant workers the security of knowing that they can take time off work if they or someone they care for is impacted by COVID-19. It is particularly appropriate to offer this to restaurant workers, who are particularly at risk of contracting COVID-19. Studies conducted in several states in various stages of the pandemic have found restaurant workers to be among the workers most likely to have contracted COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

Not only are Maine’s restaurant workers grappling with the health effects of the pandemic, but they have also had to deal with other effects of the pandemic. A recent study of Los Angeles fast food workers’ conditions found the problems such as a lack of personal protective equipment, rude and aggressive customers, and increased stress, anxiety and depression.<sup>3</sup> These are added to working conditions in the restaurant industry which often lagged behind those of other sectors – irregular schedules, low wages dependent on unpredictable tips, and a lack of benefits like health insurance or paid time off.

LD 460 allow Maine’s restaurant workers to better weather the disruptions of the pandemic by allowing them to take paid time off at an exceptionally difficult and stressful time.

LD 460 will be particularly meaningful to the number of Mainers who work in small restaurants. Businesses with 10 or fewer employees are not covered by Maine’s paid time off law, and Mainers working in the smallest restaurants are therefore not guaranteed any paid sick time. What’s more, even workers in larger businesses may only qualify for a modest amount of leave if they work an irregular number of hours each week. For these workers LD 460 fills a critical gap in the current PTO law.

Of all the businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants saw some of the biggest layoffs and have been among the slowest to regain their workforce during the recovery. This is undoubtedly because Mainers recognize that restaurants offer difficult and sometimes dangerous working conditions for relatively low pay. LD 460 will address some of those concerns and help with worker recruitment and retention by at least guaranteeing a minimum amount of sick leave for employees impacted by COVID-19.

For the sake of the restaurant workers and their employers who are so important to the economic life of vacationland, I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 460.

Thank you. I’ll be happy to take any questions.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Week 42 (January 26-February 7, 2022), Employment Table 3.

<sup>2</sup> Devean Hawkins, Letitia Davis & David Kriebel, “COVID-19 deaths by occupation, Massachusetts, March 1–July 31, 2020,” American Journal of Internal Medicine, April 2021. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8013546/>; “Fact Sheet: The Pandemic’s Toll on California Workers in High Risk Industries,” University of California MERCED, April 2021.

[https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/clc.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/fact\\_sheet\\_-\\_the\\_pandemics\\_toll\\_on\\_california\\_workers\\_in\\_high\\_risk\\_industries.pdf](https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/clc.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/fact_sheet_-_the_pandemics_toll_on_california_workers_in_high_risk_industries.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> “Fast Food Frontline: COVID-19 and Working Conditions in Los Angeles.” <https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Fast-Food-Frontline-Report-1-3-22.pdf>