

My name is Allison Hooper. I am the co-founder of Vermont Creamery in Websterville. We have been making various kinds of artisan cheese and butter for 30 years. We have 45 employees , 30 of whom work in our creamery production.

Making money in a manufacturing environment requires a rigorously tight schedule, efficiency and no extra people. When an employee calls in sick we have to re-arrange the schedule. It impacts our productivity and increases overtime. Those who oppose this bill would conclude that absenteeism is bad for business and they are right. I would say, however, that having sick people in the workplace infecting others and causing more absenteeism is also bad for business. In our business of making food, it is especially risky for the product to have sick employees at work. And, having employees resign because they can't take a day off to care for an aging parent or sick child is *really* bad for business.

I understand that some business owners worry that employees will take advantage of having a paid day off and abuse the benefit. I would submit that engaging staff in the business of fostering a meaningful workplace where employees are focused on doing their best is a better approach. At Vermont Creamery we practice open book management where the entire staff is engaged in quality and reducing cost. Gains in productivity are shared equally. It is

not in anyone's best financial interest to miss work, reduce efficiency, or increase overtime for the company. Sounds a little like Pollyana but it works. Everybody gets it.

There is always opposition to legislation to mandate regulations for business. We hear that most decent employers do the right thing and give their employees paid time off. I suspect that is true. When I learned of this legislation I immediately looked at our own policy. We met all of the proposed requirements but it made me want to offer more to be assured that we would remain competitive, attract, and retain the best people. As a result we added paid maternity and paternity leave. The point being that I think that requiring the minimum will only push us all to do a little more. This is actually an economic development tool not a deterrent. And what could be a better recruitment tool for a state than garnering a reputation for having family friendly work policies? We hear a lot of rhetoric about how young people are leaving Vermont to find work. In agriculture and food, the opposite is true. Young people *want* to live and work here. Building a great company and brand is about attracting the best talent around. At Vermont Creamery, we believe that a family friendly workplace builds community and contributes to retaining and attracting talent.

This is also a gender equality issue. As an entrepreneur and mother of three I have a great deal of empathy for the young mothers who work hard for us every day. I am amazed at how focused and productive they are at work as they lunge for their cars to meet the day care or drop everything at a moment's notice. I have been there, but I have always been an owner and never had to worry about my job security. This bill gives a modicum of parity to women in the workforce by making it okay for the *dads* to take time off to take care of a sick child and doesn't discourage women from advancing their careers or getting into the work force for the first time because they fear they can't meet the unrealistic expectation that they or their families will never get sick.

This is not a bill against business but rather a bill that does a little something for the most struggling working Vermonters. Businesses will gain more loyalty and productivity from employees, not less. And, Vermonters working several jobs without benefits will probably get the flu like the rest of us and not have to worry that they will lose their jobs. This is about doing what is right and fair by many of the people who keep our economy going everyday.