

I grew up in Vermont and now own my business, Red Hen Baking Co. with my husband here. In addition I work part time as an advocate for survivors of domestic violence at Washington County's domestic violence prevention agency, Circle.

I am a grown child, a mother, an employee, a domestic violence advocate and I am an employer.

I was here last week and listened to others testify on this issue. As a child, I was the kid who went to school sick so my single, working mother didn't have to miss work. As a mother today I value the ability to stay home with my children with pay when they are sick. As an employee (at Circle- a non-profit), I am grateful to know that my employer values my whole self enough to support me even when I need to be home sick. As an advocate for survivors of domestic violence, I have all too often seen people forced to miss work as a result of the abuse they have suffered and cannot afford to miss work, unpaid.

As an employer I have the privilege of offering these benefits to my employees. As a result of offering better wages and benefits year after year, we have seen employees feel valued and want to stay in or return to our workplace.

I certainly understand the financial pressures business owners carry when deciding on benefits for employees, but I believe wholeheartedly that the result is money-saving to my business. We have employees with us for the long term resulting in far less turnover and training. What is the first thing a Dr., Nurse or other caregiver gives to someone who is sick? "Get some rest". The message is "take care of yourself so you can back to action."

Since we started Red Hen we have chosen to invest in our people because, after all, they make the business what it is.

In an industry known for low wages and one that rarely offers benefits to employees we choose to offer health care benefits, retirement accounts, disability insurance and a good income to our employees. We choose to do so because this allows people to live happily while pursuing a career they enjoy.

Paul Saginaw of Zingerman's Delicatessen was recently in Washington promoting legislation for not just a liveable wage but a "thrive-able" wage.

Secretary Perez agreed. "What I heard from these men and women who run small businesses is that when you put more money in workers' pockets, they stay on the job longer which reduces turnover and training costs," Perez said to the business owners. "Additionally, those workers spend that extra income at local businesses in their communities, which benefits the overall economy. It's really that simple."

While we are not talking directly about liveable wage here, we are talking about costs to employees trying to live and work here in Vermont. If we can help them afford to live here then they may be able to do more than just get by and in fact thrive here!

I believe this legislation will help bring balance to our workplaces. Food service and manufacturing businesses are industries known for low wages and few or no benefits. This legislation can help correct this.

Rather than a financial hardship on our business I see Paid Time Off as an investment in the people who make our business what it is!

Please take this opportunity to support H 208

Respectfully submitted,

Eliza Cain
Co-owner, Red Hen Baking Co.
Domestic Violence Advocate, Circle