

I co-founded the Alchemist Brewery in Waterbury, Vermont with my husband, John, 12 years ago. For nearly 30 years, I have worked in the service sector and in this time I've worked alongside the most dedicated, hard-working people I will ever know. These are the folks, many of whom are single mothers, who keep our businesses running day-in and day-out, cleaning our hotel rooms, working our front desks, and ringing up our coffee and gas in the morning. These are the hard working Vermonters who, like all workers in the United States, need earned sick time.

Offering earned leave to our employees was one of the best business decisions we have ever made. Our employee turnover is relatively non-existent and our hiring and training line in the budget is \$0. We attribute this to the stability we offer our employees, which, in large part, comes from the fact that our employees can count on a full paycheck each and every week of the year without having to worry about losing wages if they or their children get sick.

I've heard some other small business owners voice their fears and concerns regarding earned sick days. I understand these fears because I know what it takes to run a small business and to struggle to make ends meet. However, after 11 years of providing earned leave for our employees, we can confidently say that these fears are misguided. Earned sick leave is designed to protect and nurture our hourly wage earners – the folks that give 100% to our businesses and keep our businesses running while they simultaneously struggle to put food on the table and gas in their cars. We must strive to make the lives of our valued employees better by providing them with the stability they need to take care of themselves and their children when they get sick.

Personally, as a woman, I also see this as a significant gender inequality issue. Nearly 1/3 of all single mothers in Vermont are living in poverty, despite the fact that they are working full time. A staggering number of low-income households are supported by single mothers and these hard working women often do not receive salaries, work for minimum wage pay, do not receive employee-sponsored health care, retirement plans, paid vacation, and can not afford to miss a day of work.

It's time for the state of Vermont and the country to stand up and show that we care about the working class, the single mothers and fathers struggling to put food on the table, and the increasing number of elders struggling to pay for housing and medication. It's time to show that we care about one another and that together we can close the gap between the working poor and the middle class and ensure that no one has to choose between their health and financial stability.

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