



To: Chair Sirotkin and the Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs
From: Hanover Co-op Food Stores General Manager Edward W. Fox and Human Resources
Director Lori Hildbrand

Since 1936, members of this consumer cooperative have been committed to concern for community and support for other locally owned businesses. Those themes are actually specified in the founding documents of our business.

Today, as a cooperative with stores and facilities in both Vermont and New Hampshire (Hartford, Lebanon and Hanover), we are pleased to have 157 Vermont residents on our workforce. Yet, looking beyond our mission statement or employment statistics, a business like ours also needs a strong local economy. Vermont producers and farms help make that possible. From Brattleboro to Grand Isle, Derby to Bennington, we source about 3,000 items from 231 Vermont suppliers, food producers and farms. The overwhelming majority of those Vermont businesses are small or tiny. Their stability matters to us.

As a cooperatively owned business able to leverage benefits to attract and retain employees, we recognize H.196 as an insurance option that will benefit and strengthen Vermont-based workers and businesses. Family and medical leave, including the ability to affordably recover from one's own illness, strengthens businesses big and small by securing the most valuable asset of any firm; the people who do the work.

We at the Hanover Co-op strongly support H.196 as a necessary benefit for the Vermont workforce and small business community. Successful passage of H.196 could also result in a cost-effective means for those employers who must provide leave under the federal FMLA to fund their leave programs by paying their employees' portion of the insurance costs of this proposed program. This added benefit would free up resources for employers to use to buy more local goods, hire more local people and pay them fairly.

With our support for the creation of this program, we respectfully encourage the committee to restore the personal medical leave insurance component of the original bill and extend the leave to 12 weeks so that it will be adequate and accessible to Vermonters during a variety of expected or unexpected challenging life events, and mirror the maximum leave period now in place under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.

Thank you.

Ed Fox
Lori Hildbrand

Nourish. Cultivate. Cooperate.