



Testimony on H.107 – Paid Leave
House General, Housing, & Military Affairs
Submitted by Erin Sigrist, VRGA President
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VRGA represents over 750 members across the state. Our membership is inclusive of a variety of business types and models, collaborative and extremely diverse. Members include general retail, grocery stores, convenience stores, distributors, food producers, and business service members. VRGA creates a unified voice for its engaged membership to influence legislation through lawmaker and public education. Our benefits are fundamental to our members' economic success and to their positive community impact.

VRGA is made up of small businesses that serve as stewards in every community across Vermont. We support local organizations; hire young adults with little to no experience and train them with the foundation of real world experience; and work right alongside the employees seven days a week.

VRGA has polled its members regarding H.107, An act relating to paid family leave and received feedback about the bill and various benefits currently offered by employers. Eight percent of respondents reports that they offer employees at least one of the following benefits: health care, dental insurance, extended paid time off, short and long-term disability, retirement plans, flexible work arrangements, and additional training/education, to name some of the most consistent benefits. An overwhelming 90% of respondents *do not* support the creation of a mandatory paid family program; however, 80% of respondents *support* the creation of a voluntary paid leave program.

As entry level employers, retailers and grocers are the training ground for the workforce and will be the most affected employers in the state should this bill move forward. Members have expressed the following concerns:

Staffing concerns: Small businesses have concern about filling management or pertinent positions for twelve weeks to ensure continuity in staffing and management of the business as well as customer service and managing employee workload.

Fund sustainability: *Should a program be established in Vermont it must be sustainable. We ask that the legislature take the time to understand the fiscal impact of creating a new system and the benefit uptake to ensure a proper understanding of overall costs.*

Mandated benefits: Small businesses are quite often working with individual employees to ensure they have benefits that are valuable to them. Each individual is different as is each business. Their ability to offer various benefits at their discrepancy is an opportunity to attract employees. Mandating benefits eliminates the ability to be a competitive employer or providing the flexibility that employees may request. We believe that businesses should have the flexibility to provide benefits within the capacity and capability of their business.