



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 16, 2020

Contact: Rep. Subeck, 608-266-7521

Rep. Pope, 608-266-3520

Assembly Democrats Address Family Leave During COVID-19 Pandemic

MADISON, WI - Today, Representative Lisa Subeck (D-Madison) and Representative Sony Pope (D-Mount Horeb) held a press teleconference to discuss the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on workers without access to paid sick leave or family leave. They were joined on the call by Kate Walton, a nurse in emergency medicine at University of Wisconsin Hospital; Justin Otto, a hospitality worker from Milwaukee; and Wanda Lavender, a lead worker at a Milwaukee Area fast food restaurant.

Rep. Pope has introduced Assembly Bill 666, which would expand family and medical leave, allowing individuals to take paid time away from work to care for a grandparent, grandchild, or sibling. The bill would establish a family and medical leave insurance program that would provide eligible individuals up to twelve weeks of family or medical leave insurance benefits. Rep. Subeck has introduced Assembly Bill 927, which would once again allow local governments to adopt their own ordinances guaranteeing workers sick or family leave. Republicans eliminated this element of local control in 2011. The current public health crisis highlights the need for these measures.

“The outbreak of COVID-19 clearly illustrates why Wisconsin and much of the United States must catch-up to the rest of the world in terms of paid family leave. The coronavirus pandemic is not only a threat to health but also economic well-being. Policies like Assembly Bills 666 and 927 would provide some relief in events such as these,” said Rep. Pope. “This unfortunate situation sheds light on how medical issues can drastically disrupt already-fragile financial situations that a large number of Wisconsin families face. I hope that the Legislature will take policies like these more seriously in the future, for the benefit of Wisconsin workers and their families, as well as the state’s economic security.”

“As we face this public health crisis, we ask that all of our citizens do their part by staying home if they are sick, yet we promise them nothing in return,” said Rep. Subeck. “The need for legislation guaranteeing paid sick leave or paid family leave is now more apparent than ever. Nobody should have to choose between their health or that of their community and their own economic security.”



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

"As a nurse in the ER, I see people all the time forced to choose between taking care of their health and being able to pay their bills," said Kate Walton. "I see patients every day who go to work despite being infectious because they need to feed their families—not because they don't care, or want to work sick, but because they have no other choice. Paid sick time is a necessity for our public health, and that's highlighted by this pandemic."

"There are millions of workers in fast food and low-paying jobs who are already just barely scraping by on paycheck to paycheck, and most don't have any paid leave at all. Workers like us don't have the option to stay home from work if we are sick because that may mean losing our jobs or our homes. We need paid sick leave for all workers and we need it now," said Wanda Lavender.

"I don't want to hold people hostage with the idea that they go to a restaurant and a server with a cold is touching their food but it's true. For the safety of everyone the workers in the hospitality industry like me need paid sick days, so we're not having to make the impossible choice of missing a paycheck or potentially spreading a virus," said Justin Otto. "It shouldn't take a public health crisis for the state of Wisconsin to put paid sick days into place. But it's better late than never, and we need paid sick leave now more than ever."

With the legislative session rapidly coming to a close, the legislators and professionals called for passage of AB 666 and AB 927 to shield Wisconsinites from economic hardship in the face of future public health crises.

###