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Background on Construction Trade Unions and Hiring Halls

Discussion of the impacts of a sick time ordinance to trade unions

The Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council represents approximately 25,000 construction workers in 21 member unions that are highly skilled in a wide array of crafts. Construction trade unions have historically had their own, unique way of both training a skilled workforce and dispatching that workforce on-demand to their construction contractor employers. They do this all while paying for their own workforce training programs at no cost to taxpayers (through registered apprenticeship programs) and while maintaining guaranteed and generous base wages, fringe and benefit packages for their members, the skilled construction workforce.

This unique system exists largely because of the transitory nature of the construction workforce: a worker may work for one employer for a day, a week, months or years. They may also work for a combination of employers over the course of a year as jobs demand. This presents unique problems for the represented construction trade industry under a possible sick time ordinance.

The following are some of the basic tenants shared by all construction trade unions, some of which are unique to the construction trade unions and not commonly understood, while others make a potential sick time mandate very difficult for our industry to implement.

Workers Dispatched through a Hiring Hall: Construction trade unions supply their employers with a steady stream of ready and able workers through a hiring hall. Qualified trade workers seeking work put their name on the hiring hall list and will be dispatched as jobs demand in sequential order from the hiring hall list. When the economy is good, this list is very short and workers are dispatched in a few days. If a worker decides they need to take an extended leave of absence or vacation, they can either seek their employer's approval for time off or they can quit and put their name back on the hiring hall list when they are ready to return to work.

Multi-Employers: Under a construction trade union collective bargaining agreement, each employer pays a package of wages, benefits and training based on an hourly rate. Regardless of which employer a trade union employee is dispatched to, they are guaranteed the same wages, fringes, and vacation allowances. Employers subject to the collective bargaining agreement hire workers directly from the hiring hall. They are guaranteed a trained and able worker who is dispatched when they need workers for a particular job.

Generous Fringe Benefit Packages: Workers dispatched under a collective bargaining agreement through a hiring hall are provided with generous fringe benefits. These have been carefully negotiated based on what membership wants and demands; it varies from craft to craft and by the level of work (i.e. apprenticeship/journey/foreman status). Employers pay

these benefits on an hourly basis so that each employer pays their fair share of the workers overall benefits. A third party administrator, governed by the union and contractors, administers health and pension benefits.

Vacation Pay Accounts: Many union members also have a "vacation pay account," which is a bank account in the employee's name. Employers make whatever hourly contribution is required by the collective bargaining agreement and deposits that amount in the employee's account. Employees are free to use the money as they see fit and can use it for vacation time, to make up for lost pay when out sick, when between jobs or other personal expenses.

Actual Hourly Wage and Benefit Packages of Eugene Member Unions

Craft	Base Wage	Pension	Health Care	Training	Vacation
Journey Electrician	$37.16	$7.14	$8.70	$0.85	N/A
Foreman Electrician	$40.88-$44.59	$7.14	$8.70	$0.85	N/A
Journey Plumber	$41.21	$10.09	$8.93	$1.05	$2.65
Foreman Plumber	$47.41 - $59.83	$10.09	$8.93	$1.05	$2.65
Journey Bricklayer	$32.75	$8.35	$7.72	$1.03	$1.30
Forman Bricklayer	$34.75-$36.25	$8.35	$7.72	$1.03	$1.30

Impacts of Proposed Ordinance: Because our members can work for so many employers over the course of a year, it will be impossible to track leave accruals and usage over several different employers. Likewise, because they change jobs frequently, they may never actually work long enough for a single employer to become eligible to use protected time.

Proposed Solution: Exempt construction trade union workers, represented by a collective bargaining agreement, from the ordinance entirely.

The Building and Construction Trade Union Council and its affiliate unions support the concept of paid and protected sick time. No worker should lose their job for being sick; we realize low-wage workers will not be able to take time if it isn't paid and see it as an important public health issue. However, none of this really applies to our workers nor is it an issue our members have struggled with or that they are demanding in contract negotiations with our employers. They are already able to take time off when necessary (for illness or otherwise) and they are provided with very generous wage and benefit packages, negotiated based on each union's own membership.

The reality of union construction work is that we are always on a deadline to work ourselves out of a job, including working of overtime at time-and-a-half when available. We have taken measures in cooperation with our employers to take care of ourselves when we are not working.