

Fighting workplace mandates on two fronts

By Doug Loon

The Minnesota Chamber continues to challenge workplace mandates at the Legislature and in the courts. A recent court ruling underscores the importance of our parallel efforts.

A Minneapolis ordinance is scheduled to take effect July 1, 2017, that requires businesses to provide paid sick time to employees. St. Paul has a similar ordinance scheduled to take effect the same date. Duluth is considering enacting its own set of workplace regulations. It's only time before similar measures come to a city near you.

In October 2016, the Minnesota Chamber brought a lawsuit against the city of Minneapolis asking the court to do two things: No. 1, issue a temporary injunction prohibiting the city from enforcing its "paid sick and safe time" ordinance on any businesses; No. 2, permanently rule the ordinance unlawful.

The Hennepin County District Court delivered a mixed ruling on January 19. Judge Mel I. Dickstein said Minneapolis may not enforce its ordinance on employers "resident outside the geographic boundaries of the city of Minneapolis." He also ordered that, for now, the city could enforce the ordinance against employers within the city. We are appealing the decision.

The judge's mixed ruling underscores the importance of our efforts at the Capitol to pass the Uniform State Labor Standards Act, which would prohibit local governments from passing their own mandates on wages, benefits and scheduling. The Act would keep Minnesota's laws uniform, our communities open for business, and our economy thriving for all.

The legislation is being spearheaded by the United for Jobs Coalition, a broad-based coalition of local chambers of commerce and business associations led by the Minnesota Chamber.

We do not believe the state should dictate private-sector employee benefits. The only thing worse than state government dictating one-size-fits-all mandates on all employers is for local governments to do so, thus creating a patchwork of local laws for businesses to navigate across the state. Minnesota's economic strength is due to a diverse business landscape. Distinctive operations and workplace needs require that employers have the flexibility to develop wages and salaries, benefits, policies and procedures that best serve the mutual needs of employer and employees.

Borrowing a sports phrase, the best defense is a strong offense. Minnesota employers consistently receive national recognition for providing tremendous workplace environments. We will continue to challenge workplace mandates. At the same time, legislators also need to hear about the voluntary wages and benefit plans employers use to attract and retain employees in this competitive marketplace. Minnesota businesses increasingly are offering leave plans that meet the needs of employees such as offer paid maternity and paternity leave, paid sick and safe leave, and other benefits—without state or local mandates. Please share your best practices by contacting Jennifer Byers at 651.292.4673 or jbyers@mnchamber.com.

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