

To the Star Tribune

In the ongoing conversation about what is the best way to support workers in Minneapolis, we agree with one key point shared recently by Nicolas R. Ziebarth and Aaron Sojourner. Their recommendations, as well as all the ideas from the Minneapolis Workplace Regulation Partnership Group (WPG) regarding provision of paid sick and safe leave, should be given sober consideration because the stakes for our City's economy are high.

We are fortunate that for our community, there is time to further review WPG recommendations before they become the law of the land here in Minneapolis. It turns out the more time one spends looking at what is being proposed, how provisions would be enacted, and their impact, it becomes more clear that the "solution" to this issue is complex and the ideas being-suggested will take our city in the wrong direction.

It is important to understand that business owners value and support people who work for them and serve their-customers. The City of Minneapolis does not have to instruct employers on how to treat their employees well. However, over the past year that is just how many employers throughout our city have felt.

The WPG proposed what is essentially a one size fits all solution via recommended rules that would be imposed on thousands of employers; many of whom have personnel policies and practices in place that work well for them and the people they employ. This is a wrong-headed approach.

Nicolas and Aaron are right that it is currently an employer's choice whether or not to offer their employees sick and safe time. What they left out is that the vast majority of employers work hard to provide their employees with customized leave options, often times including sick and safe time, that are tailored to their specific industries, their individual workforces, and each employee's unique personal life.

Combine the broad range of employers in Minneapolis with an ordinance of this magnitude and the result is likely to be a multitude of both predicted and unintended consequences that could be debilitating to Minneapolis's workforce and economy. There is currently limited research or evidence regarding a long list of circumstances surrounding how an ordinance like this will impact small businesses, future business development in Minneapolis, operational and financial impact on both a business and City, and the effect on wage growth and labor costs. The list of unknowns goes on and on. No one has been able to even predict if the benefit to workers will outweigh these predicted and other unintended factors.

Minneapolis is not an island, but rather part of an integrated, regional economy with a highly mobile workforce. Minneapolis officials should be cautious when considering an ordinance that will contribute to making Minneapolis a singularly costly, unattractive and complicated place to own and conduct business in the metro area.

Of the approximately 300,000 who work in Minneapolis, only 25% of these employees also live in Minneapolis. WPG recommendations would also affect employees of businesses located outside the City who happen to work in Minneapolis. This means that any action implemented based on the WPG report will have an outsized affect on business and workers who are not City constituents. This as a boundary Minneapolis elected officials should not overstep.

There are ways that the Workplace Regulations Partnership Group's recommendations can and should be improved with more review and public input. It is clear we need to spend more time developing suggestions to find the best way to proceed with efforts to address-sick and safe leave availability in a way that would satisfy small-business owners, large-employers, workers and labor leaders. This needs to happen before any of these rules are enacted in what could be an incredibly risky experiment.

The Workforce Fairness Coalition has presented an idea based on building a community partnership, an approach that encourages and lifts employers up in an effort to expand worker access to sick and safe time. A collaborative approach can work, as we have seen with other issues in Minneapolis, most recently creation of the Clean Energy Partnership as an alternative to city take-over of private utilities.

Nicolas and Aaron are right that serious consideration should be given to this issue and what is being proposed. There needs to be consideration that is thorough, and comprehensive to make sure any actions taken are better understood, more completely reviewed, and better designed to make sure we actually help people and not hurt our economy.