

Saint Paul Pioneer Press, *“Opinion: Paid Leave Ordinance,”* March 16, 2017

PAID LEAVE ORDINANCE

The Feb. 19 Pioneer Press included a discussion of the St. Paul and Minneapolis paid sick leave ordinances that go into effect July 1. The article presents an opportunity for the city of St. Paul to further the discussion of what employers and employees should know about the earned sick and safe time ordinance in St. Paul.

Nationwide, a growing number of employers and local governments are enacting employee paid-leave policies because of the economic benefits to both employees and employers. Employees have the economic security to take care of themselves and their families. Employers benefit by having a more stable workforce. Employers that offer paid sick and safe time to employees improve employee retention, and a healthier workforce increases productivity. Similarly, in the course of implementing and administering ESST, the city will balance the needs and benefits of both the employer and the employee. As an employer, the city of St. Paul believes in the benefits of paid employee leave and enacted its own ESST policy on Jan. 1 — six months ahead of the required ESST effective date.

Much of the discussion about ESST has focused on sick leave. ESST also includes time for employees to deal with safety issues. According to the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, at least 21 people were killed in Minnesota because of domestic-violence-related homicides in 2016, and 60,000 domestic abuse survivors and their children accessed services through domestic violence programs. If access to paid leave will help a victim escape an unsafe situation, take time to file a restraining order or police report or find support services, the city of St. Paul will work with St. Paul employers to meet that expectation.

As we work with employers to implement ESST, we understand that some St. Paul businesses are concerned about the obligations of providing paid leave. We hear those concerns, and the city is committed to working with businesses to smooth their transition of understanding the obligations listed in the ESST ordinance.

The Department of Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity is responsible for the implementation of the ESST ordinance. As the neutral regulator of the ordinance, HREEO will provide technical assistance, resources and outreach to St. Paul businesses to make ESST compliance as easy as possible. Enforcement of ESST in St. Paul will focus on ensuring employees have access to ESST, not on creating administrative burdens or leveling overly punitive sanctions.

HREEO will publish St. Paul ESST rules by April 1. ESST rules, frequently asked questions and multi-language sample workplace posters will be available at

www.stpaul.gov/esst, where individuals can also find a copy of the ESST ordinance, additional ESST resources and sign up for ESST email updates.

The new law applies to employers with 24 or more employees starting July 1, and all other employers starting Jan. 1, 2018. Employees accrue at least one hour of ESST for every 30 hours worked in St. Paul. Employees may use ESST for their own health issues, to care for a family member or for safety reasons. Employers maintain the right to take reasonable action against employees not using ESST in good faith.

St. Paul is a great place to start and build a business, live, work and find the economic security of both businesses and individuals. As additional ESST guidance is provided and we move toward the July 1 effective date, the city of St. Paul wants employers and employees to know city staff are available and ready to help.

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