

## House OKs paid-leave benefits to care for sick family members

Jaime Malarkey  
The Examiner

March 25, 2008

**Annapolis** - A proposal requiring Maryland employers to allow employees to use paid sick leave to care for parents, spouses and children appears headed for final approval despite protests from business owners.

House members Monday voted 90-46 on the measure, which affects private-sector employers who currently offer paid-leave benefits. A similar bill already has passed the Senate — but exempted businesses with fewer than 15 employees — and both are more flexible than the Family Medical Leave Act, a federal law that requires public and private employers to grant unpaid leave for certain family obligations.

Flexible leave requirements will encourage honesty in the workplace, said Del. Dereck Davis, a Prince George's County Democrat who supported the proposal.

"We are going to do what we have to for our family," Davis said.

Under the proposal, an employer would be prohibited from taking action against an employee who takes advantage of the expanded leave benefits.

But some lawmakers said most companies already allow employees paid time off to care for family members.

Howard County Republican Del. Gail Bates called the legislation a "solution looking for a problem." Others expressed concern with maintaining state-required staffing levels at regulated health care facilities.

During debate at a House session Saturday, Del. John Wood Jr., a St. Mary's County Democrat and business owner, said many employees abuse sick leave, and unsuccessfully suggested removing provisions for spouses and parents and limiting the care of children to minors.

"I've had people use their sick leave or vacation time because they woke up one morning with a hangover or they want to go fishing or whatever," Wood said.

The legislation does not affect small businesses that don't currently offer paid-leave benefits or require businesses to offer them, Davis said. Differences between the two bills must be reconciled before formal adoption.

A similar bill failed during last year's legislative session.

[jmalarkey@baltimoreexaminer.com](mailto:jmalarkey@baltimoreexaminer.com)

Examiner