

Montclair's earned paid sick time advocates prepare for November ballot



Staff Photo by Andrew Segedin

From left, District 5 Freeholder Brendan Gill, Deputy Mayor Robert Russo, New Jersey Citizen Action Executive Director Phyllis Salowe Kaye, BlueWave NJ President Marcia Marley, 3rd Ward Councilman Sean Spiller, New Jersey Working Families Executive Director Analilia Mejia and former New Jersey NAACP President James Harris speak out in favor of earned paid sick time.

Paid sick time

With Election Day less than a month away, Montclair officials and community advocates are stepping up efforts to develop local support for earned paid sick time for private sector workers in the township.

As reported, groups such as Montclair-based BlueWave NJ, New Jersey Citizen Action and New Jersey Working Families collected enough petition signatures in August to place the question of earned paid sick time on Montclair's November ballot. The ordinance, if favored by the public, would allow workers in the township to earn one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked.

The Township Council, in August, had the opportunity to enact the ordinance without it going to the ballot, but elected

to leave the decision to the voters.

In subsequent council meetings, members of Montclair's business community have spoke both in favor and in opposition to the proposed ordinance. During the council's Sept. 9 meeting, Upper Montclair Business Association President Diane Esty questioned how the ordinance would impact small business owners and how it could be enforced by the township.

On Monday, proponents of the ordinance gathered into Vital on Bloomfield Avenue to announce plans for the upcoming month. Phyllis Salowe Kaye, executive director of New Jersey Citizen Action, said that Montclairites can expect boots on the ground in the coming month, with an active canvassing and phone banking effort. BlueWave NJ President Marcia Marley said that prospective volunteers may sign up at BlueWave's campaign headquarters at 460 Bloomfield Ave.

Seventy-eight percent of local low-income workers and 80 percent of part-time workers are unable to earn paid sick time, Marley said. Citing auditor reports from Seattle and Washington D.C., both of which have implemented similar ordinances, Marley said that the impact the law has on small business is negligible.

Several Montclair elected officials also through their support behind the ballot question. District 5 Freeholder and Montclair Democratic Chair Brendan Gill described the ordinance as "the decent and right thing to do," adding that 40 percent of Montclair's private sector workers do not currently have access to paid sick days.

Deputy Mayor Robert Russo and 3rd Ward Councilman Sean Spiller also backed the ordinance. Russo opined that the ordinance is not anti-business nor partisan, citing President Theodore Roosevelt's position that workers should have limited workdays and paid holidays some 110 years ago.

Spiller said that public backing the law made sense in a municipality such as Montclair, which prides itself on being progressive. The councilman added that, by voting in support of the ordinance, Montclair would be showing "strong commitment to family values."

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