

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS

LOCAL NO. 49, 49A, 49B, 49C, 49D, 49E, 49L
MINNESOTA • NORTH DAKOTA • SOUTH DAKOTA

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Dear Conferees on House File 2,

I want to express my concerns about the paid family leave proposals you all are debating right now. I specifically ask you to consider their impact on collective bargaining rights in Minnesota. Let me be clear, I support a paid family leave program for those workers who want one, currently don't have one, and who do not have a voice on the job to fight for it themselves. Your intent is good, and I applaud your work.

What I'm saying to you is, for those of us who have fought for the right to collectively bargain, who have earned and exercised our rights to form a union, let us decide for ourselves which benefits we want to pursue. We, not the Legislature, should determine what our priorities are at the negotiating table.

In the last several decades, our union built a best-in-class health plan that is among the largest self-funded health plans in the region (and provides a maternity leave benefit for female members). We are the largest contributor to the second-largest pension fund in America that is currently 100% funded and has never been in the red zone. Within the last three years we created a new defined contribution plan that will add even more retirement security for members. These are just a few of the benefits we have chosen to bargain for and build.

We just negotiated the largest construction agreement in this state — close to 9,000 members work under our Minnesota Highway and Heavy agreement building Minnesota's infrastructure — paid leave was not something our members asked us to pursue for too many reasons to list.

If there is a time when our members want a paid family leave system, Local 49 will get them one. If our members ask for it, we will create a system they can use without shorting their retirement and health-care funding or missing overtime pay they need. That is exactly what we have done for the thousands of members we represent in the public sector and standalone shop agreements we have. Those members wanted paid leave, and we got it in every one of those agreements. Our members in the public sector have great benefits, they want and need more money on their paycheck. This proposal hurts our ability to pursue those gains in wages at the table as it shrinks the budgets of cities and counties.

As it stands right now, our members are going to be taxed for an added benefit that they didn't ask for and doesn't work well for them in both the public and private sector.

The Minnesota State Building Trades has put forward a fix that would simply allow our members to decide for themselves whether they want to be in this new state program, create their own paid leave program, or be free to focus on enhancing the world-class wages and benefits they already have by agreeing to an exemption in collective bargaining. Other states have accommodated the wish of union members to decide our own fate. Illinois completely exempted construction unions from their paid family leave bill, for example.

House and Senate majority leadership and the Governor have had the building trades language for months. So far, it has not been accepted. We ask you to respect our rights to collectively bargain for pay and benefits we choose, and to adopt the MN State Building Trades language, which does exactly that.

Respectfully,

Jason George
Business Manager