

Testimony of Allison Brimeyer
Board of Regents Public Forum on the University Budget
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My name is Allison Brimeyer, I'm a member of AFSCME Local 3800 and I provide faculty support at the Carlson School, a job that I am proud of, and that my colleagues and faculty think is valuable. But despite feeling valued in my workplace, I don't feel that from the University. One de-valuing reality at the U is our parental leave system, which provides a minimum paid leave of six weeks for faculty and P&A but that for us frontline staff is a 'build your own leave' system with a mere two week minimum.

We're told that it's not so bad - that we can just use accrued sick time on top of our two weeks, but that doesn't work for us.

It's hard to save sick time up. Accrual isn't overly generous so there's not much leftover to save if you use sick time to stay home when you're.. sick. So it takes us many, many years to save up enough just to receive the same paid time that faculty get on day one. A distinction needs to be made between parental leave and sick time.

Here's a story of a worker I know who took leave under the current system.

When she saw the little graph on HR's website that shows different benefits for faculty and staff, she was 'shocked'; she wasn't expecting to be treated like a 2nd class citizen at the U. **So she did what you say we should do** - and she saved her sick time for two years by not taking any. She came to work with colds, and she came to work with the flu (btw I hope you'll think about that everytime time you're having a lunch that was cooked by Teamsters).

She came to work every day of her pregnancy, despite feeling sick. She had a contraction DURING HER WORK COMMUTE, but kept driving, and worked two hours the morning she gave birth, just to ration her time.

That is a true story, and this is our truth -- because of these policies, while we provide your office support, clean your bathrooms, and cook your lunches, many of us are working instead of taking proper care of ourselves.

And this system is not popular -- we of course know that it's unfair, but I have never talked to anyone who holds a prestigious job at the U who that thinks this inequity in benefits is acceptable for minimal short-term budget savings.

But President Kaler, I've been here long enough to know you are not moved by human suffering or by popular opinion, so here is some information to support that an equitable policy can both benefit the University's bottom line *and* workers:

Expanding paid leave in the workplaces encourages high-quality, dedicated employees to stay longer, which saves money and improves efficiency.

For example, When Google increased paid leave from 12 to 18 weeks in 2007, the rate at which new parents left fell by 50%, reducing costly turnover, and retaining the valued expertise and skills of workers.

Research shows that mothers who take adequate leave have children with better health and educational outcomes. So think about that - while we spend time and resources thinking about the achievement gap in this state, explicit inequity is perpetuated HERE and is preventing children from thriving.

If I had more time, I'd go on, as there's plenty of research on the benefits of paid leave, but... The good news is that the tide is turning. This year, President Obama increased paid parental leave for ALL FEDERAL employees, regardless of gender, to six weeks minimum, and states are beginning to make paid parental leave mandatory.

So I'm here to demand that you make the University an institution where ALL new parents, no matter what job we do, are supported in the workplace, rather than discouraged and budgeted against.

As our University leadership, you have a choice: you can continue to bury your heads in the sand, and think small, like some kind of Wal-Mart Board. Or you can recognize the truth: that it's time for this public, land-grant institution to lead the way forward, toward a more equitable paradigm for working parents in Minnesota.

Thank you.