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SB 14 Oppresses the Voices of Texans

Please Oppose SB 14: A Step Backward for Working Texans

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In the absence of state action, local jurisdictions across Texas have listened to the needs of their constituents and responded to calls to pass local ordinances that seek to raise standards for working families. Cities and municipalities have passed laws which improve economic security and public health such as paid sick leave requirements and fair chance hiring policies.

Had these local responses been in place as millions of Texans have experienced severe disruptions in their lives from the pandemic, we would have had a more resilient and healthy workforce.

Even before the pandemic, too many hard-working Texas families were struggling to make ends meet, while income disparity and inequality continues to balloon. Average income has grown for the top fifth of households at 1.5 times the rate of the bottom fifth of households^[1]. Current state law already ties the hands of community leaders by prohibiting locally elected officials from ensuring businesses pay their employees a living wage through minimum wage preemption. Despite this, local officials continue to work to ensure the hard working Texans most likely to be impacted, such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, have a chance to provide for their families through other workplace protections.

This legislation continues Texas' race to the bottom by ignoring the voices of a workforce that is the powerhouse of the Texas economy.

SB 14 is an attack on local democracy.

State officials should ensure basic protections for Texans across the state but allow locally elected officials to set higher standards as their communities see fit. [A statewide poll of Texas voters conducted in February 2019 by Baseline and Associates](#) found the following:

- 87% of Texas voters believe their local elected officials are better connected to their communities and should be allowed to pass policies that reflect their community's needs and values.
- 83% agreed that local governments pass local ordinances that create strong local economies which contribute to a strong state economy.
- 82% of Texas voters were bothered that the state legislatures were passing laws that ban all local governments in their state from passing any policies that address economic issues, meaning that local communities are powerless to do anything to regulate business that might help their local economy or protect workers.
- More specifically, 74% favor allowing cities and counties to establish paid sick day requirements for local governments and for businesses.

SB 14 reduces public health and opportunity.

This harmful legislation prohibits local jurisdictions from passing or enforcing any policy that offers minimum protections for employees. Here are just a few of the critical policies that would be prohibited under SB 14:

Paid Sick Leave: 40% of working Texans lack access to Paid Sick Leave representing 4.3 million people.^[iii] This means they must choose between staying home when they or a family member is sick or sacrificing their paycheck. For low wage earners across the state, studies have shown that missing 3.5 days of unpaid work equates to household's entire monthly grocery bill.^[iii]

Paid sick leave policies are also critical to public health. For example, occupations like food preparation and serving are among those with the lowest rates of access to paid sick leave at 19%.^[iv] In a survey of Houston restaurant workers, 74% reported cooking or serving food while sick because they lacked access to paid sick leave.^[i]

Paid Family and Medical Leave: Nearly one in four pregnant women who are employed return to work within two weeks of giving birth, primarily because they cannot afford to go without pay.^[iii] Federal law mandates that employees of large companies must be given at a minimum, unpaid, job protected time to care for themselves, a new child, or a seriously ill child, spouse or parent. While this protection is important, it only covers approximately 60 percent of the population and most individuals are not financially able to take this time off unpaid. Paid Family and Medical Leave policies enable employees to take paid time off when these life events occur through a system of insurance programs paid for by both employees and employers.

Pay History Discrimination: Workers should be paid fairly for the work they are doing, rather than being paid based on a previous job's wage that may not be commensurate to the current job. Pay history discrimination policies prohibit employers from asking for wage history information from job seekers. These policies provide pathways for low wage workers to move into middle-wage jobs when their skill sets qualify them for the work.

This bill also includes preemption of "ban the box" policies, preventing policies that prohibit criminal history questions on job applications, and policies requiring fair scheduling.

The role of government is to protect citizens. Government upholds laws that protect citizens through prohibiting businesses from polluting our air and water sources as well as preventing the exploitation of workers. Without reasonable regulation of the employee/employer relationship, the individual interests of businesses would supersede the collective good of society. Take for example the unfortunate truth as to why we have child labor laws in this county.

SB 14 fails Texans by ignoring the needs of hard working families who support our strong economy.

Rather than banning local governments from ensuring their communities are more equitable and fair for hard working Texans, state leaders should be working to pass stronger statewide protections for Texans. These statewide protections should serve as a floor or set of minimum standard protections across the state. Local voters and elected officials should be allowed to expand those protections to reflect the needs and values of their communities.

[i] CPPP analysis of U.S Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Table B19081, 2006 & 2017 1-year estimates, Texas with Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI Inflation Calculator

[ii] Milli, J. *Access to Paid Sick Time in Texas*. Institute for Women's Policy Research. March 2017

[iii] Gould, E. & Schieder, J. **Work sick or lose pay?** Economic Policy Institute. June 2017

[iv] Institute for Women's Policy Research. **Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings**. February 2016.