

Philadelphia Business Journal - February 5, 2007

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N.J. state committee approves family leave bill

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New Jersey moved closer to becoming the second state to offer paid family leave on Monday, with the 3-1 approval of a bill by the Senate labor committee.

The legislation, introduced by Sen. Stephen M. Sweeney, D-Gloucester, in October, would expand the state's temporary disability insurance (TDI) to cover up to 12 weeks of leave by an employee to care for a newborn, newly adopted child or seriously ill family member. Workers, as under TDI, would receive two-thirds of their weekly pay up to a maximum of 53 percent of the average weekly wage for all workers in the state, which is \$502.

Under the legislation, companies could require workers to use up to two weeks of sick, vacation or other paid leave prior to taking the paid family leave. The paid leave would be funded by a 0.1 percent assessment on each worker's salary, up to an amount equal to the Social Security tax base, which would amount to less than a \$1 per week for the average worker by Sweeney's estimates.

Business with fewer than 50 employees, which are currently exempt from unpaid leave laws, would be subject to the new law if it was adopted. Local governments that are now able to opt out of TDI would also be subject to the legislation under an amendment introduced on Monday, Sweeney's office said.

The Chamber of Commerce of Southern New Jersey is among state business groups opposing the legislation for fear it would hurt businesses by leaving them without essential employees for long periods of time and burden them with the expense of paying others to replace them.

The legislation will most likely move to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee next and then to the Senate floor for consideration, Sweeney's office said.

In addition to Sweeney, Sen. Barbara Buono, D-Middlesex, served as a primary sponsor on the bill and Sens. Joseph Coniglio, D-Bergen, and Loretta Weinberg, D-Bergen, served as co-sponsors.

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