

# Councilors seek Monday vote on part of paid leave bill

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BY JESSICA DYER / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The Albuquerque city councilors backing paid sick leave legislation say they plan



a. Isaac Benton

to split their bill in two and pursue action on only half of it when the council convenes Monday.

Isaac Benton and Lan Sena's paid sick leave proposal requires employers to provide full-time workers up to 80 hours of "public health emergency paid leave" through Dec. 31, and to give a comparable benefit to part-time workers.

Supporters say the bill is necessary because some local businesses are not complying with related requirements under the federal Families First Act. Effective since April 1, the act requires U.S. employers with under 500 workers to offer paid leave for COVID-19-related absences through Dec. 31. The

government pays for the sick leave via tax credits.

But the Benton/Sena bill as written also would require employers to provide a permanent earned paid sick leave benefit starting Jan. 1.

Benton said Wednesday the sponsors would only seek a vote on the bill's 2020 component Monday, citing a hiccup in the formal newspaper publishing of the ordinance. He said that would defer permanent paid leave components until August.

But the councilors have more in store for Monday.

They also want a vote on their separate "premium pay" bill. It requires large businesses deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide up to \$75 extra per shift to workers earning \$15 or less per hour. The hazard benefit would apply to businesses with at least 50 workers.

Some business owners and associations have railed against the proposals, arguing they raise costs at a time many are struggling due to COVID-19-related

closures and restrictions. They also say city voters have demonstrated they do not want paid sick leave, citing the narrow defeat of a similar measure during a 2017 election.

Benton said Wednesday he and Sena are meeting with business leaders for more discussion about the premium pay proposal but he deems paid sick leave as less debatable.

“Our commitment to backing up the Families First Act are — I’m not going to say they’re non-negotiable — but these are longstanding community demands,” Benton said during a news conference outside City Hall.

The bills’ supporters say they are vital for low-wage, front-line workers. They say the pandemic — which has disproportionately affected people of color — has further exposed longstanding socioeconomic and racial disparities.

According to a 2018 paid sick leave study from the University of New Mexico Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 36% of Albuquerque workers do not have paid sick leave — more than 100,000 individuals. The lowest-income households are least likely to have it — 10% of those with annual household incomes under \$15,000 have paid leave, compared with 80% with incomes between \$75,000 and \$99,999.

“Not only should paid sick leave be a fundamental human right, but it should be part of our city’s public health plan to curb the spread of COVID-19,” said Marian Méndez-Cera, an organizer with the immigrant rights organization El Central de Igualdad y Derechos.