



Opinion: The Earned Sick Time Act: A Tough Pill for Businesses to Swallow

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In 1993, my husband and I embarked on a journey that combined our passion for home-brewing with a love for exploring local breweries during our vacations. Back then, breweries were few and far between, making each discovery an adventure. Fueled by this passion, we created a 10-year plan and committed ourselves to living frugally as we prepared to take the leap in opening our own brewery. After scouring southeast Michigan for the perfect location, an opportunity arose just a mile from our home in Washington Township. We transformed several properties into a stunning new brewery and restaurant. In January 2015, we proudly opened Brown Iron Brewhouse, welcoming 6,000 guests in our first week – an overwhelming testament to our dream coming to life.

As a proud small business owner, my husband and I have dedicated our life to creating a community hub where friends and families gather to enjoy great food, craft beer, and a warm atmosphere. Brown Iron Brewhouse is more than just a restaurant; it's a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit and the hard work of many dedicated individuals. Small businesses like ours are the backbone of Michigan's economy, yet we face a looming challenge with the impending implementation of the Earned Sick Time Act (ESTA) on February 21st.

While the intent behind the ESTA – to safeguard employee health and well-being – is admirable, its current form poses significant hurdles that could jeopardize the sustainability of small businesses.

One concern is the lack of differentiation within the Act, which applies the same blanket regulations to all businesses, ignoring Michigan's diverse business landscape. At Brown Iron Brewhouse, our employees appreciate the flexibility of working for a small business, allowing us to adapt to individual needs and foster a supportive environment. However, the rigid structure of the ESTA threatens this flexibility. It imposes constraints not suited to small businesses. We've had to reduce our generous benefits package and ask for employee contributions due to the Act's costs. The ESTA doesn't allow employers and employees to collaboratively tailor unique benefits packages.

Another particularly concerning provision of the ESTA allows employees to "no call, no show" for three consecutive days without prior notice. In an industry already grappling with staffing shortages, this could exacerbate the problem, hindering our ability to serve customers in the way they deserve to be served.

Financially, the ESTA presents a daunting challenge for small businesses. Compliance with the current requirements would necessitate a complete overhaul of existing paid leave policies, leading to increased costs and logistical nightmares. While we are committed to supporting our staff, the Act, as it stands, could force businesses like mine to make tough decisions, such as reducing hours or increasing prices, to absorb these new expenses.

It's a myth that small businesses do not want to offer sick time to their employees. At Brown Iron Brewhouse, we understand that a healthy, satisfied workforce is integral to our success. Our employees are an extension of our family. However, the ESTA in its current form imposes burdens that could undermine the very businesses it aims to regulate.

I urge policymakers to revisit the Act, taking into account the varied landscape of Michigan businesses. A more flexible, tailored approach could better serve both employees and employers, ensuring small businesses continue to thrive and contribute to our local economies. Let's engage in meaningful dialogue to find solutions that balance employee rights with the practical needs of businesses, safeguarding the health of Michigan's economy for everyone's benefit. By working together we can create a policy that supports employees without compromising the viability of small businesses, ensuring a prosperous future for all.