

To: Senate Business, Labor, and Economic  
Affairs Committee

From: Sarah Rossi, Public Policy Director

Re: SB 221 – Include domestic violence  
situations under reason for paid leave

Date: February 7, 2013



**Montana Coalition**  
Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

406.443.7794 • 888.404.7794

Fax: 406.443.7818

PO Box 818

Helena, Montana 59624

Mr. Chairman and Members of Senate Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs Committee:

My name is Sarah Rossi. I am the Public Policy Director for the The Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCADSV, for short). As a refresher we are the statewide advocacy organization for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. We also advocate on behalf of the programs in your communities who provide services to battered women and sexual assault and stalking victims. In our continued effort to end violence against women, we rise in support of SB 221.

Though domestic violence and sexual assault issues are not commonly seen in this committee, it is common knowledge that being abused, stalked, or sexually assaulted can severely impact a person's life. This body has expressed its support for accommodations for victims of these crimes in the past. Unemployment insurance currently covers these unfortunate circumstances. This bill is an additional step which will allow victims to maintain employment and therefore have a greater chance to become financially independent in the pursuit of freedom from their attacker and circumstances.

Victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or stalking, especially low-income victims, are often forced to choose between employment and escape. In fact, many women stay in abusive situations because they are worried about job loss if they ask for time off to access help. Accessing shelter or advocacy services, medical services, or the justice system requires being absent from work during a normal 9-5 work day. If a victim needs an order of protection, for example, it will often require multiple steps that can only be accomplished in court, for multiple hours.

SB 221 is not asking employers to increase paid leave for employees – it is simply asking that victims of these crimes be allowed to use existing sick, personal, or vacation leave to access the services necessary to remove themselves from dangerous circumstances. Paid time off can be the difference between getting critical help or delaying a move into a safe situation. Instead of punishing victims with the loss of employment, we should assist them in getting the services they need to move forward with a safe and healthy life for themselves and their children. Please vote yes. Thank you for your time.