

Testimony on HB923, Illness and Injury Prevention Programs

Chairman Davis, Vice Chair Dumais. Good afternoon. My name is Scott Schneider. I am a Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH) and a Fellow Member of the American Industrial Hygiene Association. I have been working as an industrial hygienist for over 40 years and most of my career has been focused on construction safety and health. I retired a few years ago from the Laborers' Health and Safety Fund of North America where I was Director of Occupational Safety and Health for over 17 years. I have been a Maryland resident for over 35 years living in District 20. I am testifying today on behalf of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health. I am testifying in support of this bill.

Illness and Injury Prevention programs work. I have appended to my testimony a report issued by Federal OSHA in 2012 which recounts the research supporting this statement. Many states already require them. California has required them for 30 years. Why do they require them? Because Illness and Injury Prevention Programs save lives. States with illness and injury prevention program requirements had 31% fewer fatalities than other states. OSHA has estimated that these programs will also reduce injury and illness rates by 15- 35%, saving \$9-\$35 billion dollars in workers compensation payments alone if implemented nationwide. All the companies in OSHA Voluntary Protection Program, which is only available to the nation's best companies, have such programs. The bottom line is you can't really address illness and injuries in your workplace without a plan. You have to outline a systematic approach to prevention. Management commitment and employee involvement are the most important elements of such a plan. Which is where joint health and safety committees come in. One note, for required training, I would suggest training be done in the languages spoken by most workers in that workplace.

Employees are the ones who know the workplace best and are usually the first to recognize and identify hazards at work. They also have the best ideas to fix them. Their active participation, through a joint health and safety committee, helps ensure the success of the entire program. Not all health and safety committees are successful. Their success depends on choosing representatives who are not afraid to speak up, having adequate resources and time, effective training of committee members and giving the committee the authority and budget to act. But having a committee allows the possibility of active involvement of workers and active surveillance of the workplace to identify problems early and allow them to be corrected before an injury occurs. Without such committees it is difficult to solicit and encourage worker input and participation which is so essential to workplace prevention efforts. Committee members should get trained to they can be most effective in their roles.

For these reasons, I encourage you to give a Favorable report for this bill. I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you.