

Sample Letter from SRA to Senator

Dear Senator:

I am a restaurateur and live in _____. My restaurant employs XX individuals. [Insert more details about your business and story here.]

The restaurant industry represents 13 million employees, serving 133 million guests in 945,000 restaurant and food service locations each day. The average restaurateur is a small business owner with a profit margin of less than 4% in good economic times. Over the past two years, sales have decreased considerably.

I support the objectives of health care reform and the intent to lower costs and increase access to health care coverage. However, the legislation must consider the economic and operational realities facing my business and industry. The employer responsibilities as proposed represent a very significant challenge and burden for restaurateurs like me and threaten the continued viability of my business. To that end, I want to call your attention to five areas that have the most significant impact on restaurants and urge your support for the following provisions.

I urge you to support:

A part-time worker exemption. Part-time employees are an essential component of the restaurant industry. On average, 43 percent of restaurant workers work more than 30 hours per week. Many of our employees work for multiple employers, or receive coverage under another's health plan. It is critical restaurateurs be allowed to set the criteria for offering health benefits to part-time workers.

A robust small business exemption. As an industry comprised mainly of small businesses, it's critical that any reform have a robust small business exemption. Over 90% of eating and drinking places have fewer than 50 employees. With profit margins less than 4 percent, and industry sales down considerably over the last two years, small business simply can not bear the burden of additional costs.

A 90-day waiting period for new hires so I can provide my committed full-time employees the highest quality benefits at the most affordable price. The restaurant industry is unique, with an extremely flexible work environment and higher than average turnover rates. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 75 percent of our employees leave their jobs annually – a rate 25 percent higher than the overall private sector at 49 percent.

A modified the definition of full-time employee to 390 hours per calendar quarter (13 weeks) instead of the current 30 hours per week on average. The modified definition takes into account fluctuations in hours an employee works, and would help reduce the impact of employer requirements for restaurateurs like me.

Preserve current ERISA protections. The restaurant industry is a strong proponent of ERISA because it provides larger companies the regulatory framework to offer a uniform health benefits package across state lines. Preserving the ERISA framework, allows employers to maintain the ability to offer competitive and more affordable coverage in part through the financial and administrative savings permitted by this uniform national standard.

It is essential we take steps to rein in health care costs and expand coverage. However, without these modifications and exemptions, the industry will face tremendous hardship and decline.

Before this legislation is finalized through conference, please consider the restaurant industry's economic profile and structure so that we as employers can truly offer - and employees can truly benefit from - the goals this reform seeks to achieve. I look forward to working constructively with you to reach that outcome.

Sincerely,