



CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. CHANGE IS HAPPENING.

**Testimony before the Oregon House Business & Labor Committee in support of SB 1548
Andrea Paluso, Family Forward Oregon, The Mother PAC
February 20, 2012**

Chairs Kennemer and Garrett and Members of the Committee:

My name is Andrea Paluso and I am the Executive Director of Family Forward Oregon and The Mother PAC. I am here today testifying in support of SB 1548, the Fair Employment Opportunity Act.

SB 1548 is a bill that will make it easier for all Oregonians to get back to work – including those who have been out of the workforce for more than six months.

In the current economy with our state's unemployment rate hovering around 9%, it makes good sense to facilitate employment, not stand in its way. And that's why we support this bill, and urge you to, as well.

The Fair Employment Opportunity Act removes a barrier for those who want to return to work. If it doesn't pass, people who have been unemployed for over six months will continue to be blocked from even applying work – simply because of the amount of time they've been unemployed. With the average unemployment period at 40 weeks (a little over nine months), and 4 of every 10 unemployed Oregonians out of work for over six months, correcting this problem is a timely and common-sense way to help people get back to work. It's also a positive message from Salem in the midst of tough budget news.

The barrier that HB 1548 corrects is especially relevant for mothers (and some fathers), many of whom step out of the workforce - by choice or force - to care for a child(ren) for more than six months. When these parents prepare to return to work, there are enough barriers to re-entry without any additional, unnecessary disqualifications.

Family Forward Oregon's mission is to help Oregon families thrive by championing public and workplace policies that make it possible to successfully care for a family today – with all the time that can require - *and* remain economically secure.

I urge you to support the Fair Employment Opportunity Act, a common-sense bill to make it easier for unemployed Oregonians – including full-time caregiving parents - to get back to work.