

# ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

*Serving together in faith*

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Representative Margaret Doherty, Chair  
Representative Brent Barton, Vice-Chair  
Representative Bill Kennemer, Vice-Chair  
House Business and Labor Committee

Re: HB 2950

Dear Chair Doherty, Co-Vice Chair Barton, and Co-Vice Chair Kennemer and Members of the Committee:

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide organization of religious denominations, congregations, and community-based cooperative ministries representing hundreds of Oregonians in every rural and urban community throughout the state of Oregon. Our testimony today emanates from our shared religious values that affirm the value of love, the respect for all life, and the dignity of every human being. Our faith also acknowledges the importance of family and efforts to strengthen those bonds, in both life and death. We urge your support of HB 2950, Bereavement Leave, which would include the death of a family member as one of the reasons employees of businesses with at least 25 employees could take unpaid leave to grieve and take care of personal matters.

Holy Scripture states that, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; (Ecclesiastes 3: 1, 2a,4)." Grief and loss are a part of every life. The death of someone we love changes our lives forever. The transition from the initial loss to some level of acceptance is usually a long and painful journey. Compassionate societies acknowledge that allowing for time for this transition— to make arrangements necessitated by the death of an immediate family member, to attend a funeral or memorial, and frequently, to receive counseling or medical treatment to help cope with the death of a loved one, helps the survivors heal after such a death.

Our organization includes clergy and other religious leaders who counsel those who are suffering from loss and are intimately aware that taking time apart is an integral part of the process towards healing. Whether the death was sudden or anticipated, acknowledging the full reality of the loss may occur over weeks and months. The circumstances surrounding the death may require days to transport the body to their home, as in the case of a military casualty. Family members often live many miles from the location of the funeral and require time to travel. And after the funeral or memorial, a husband or wife, son or daughter, mother or father surely suffer from the physical, emotional and spiritual toll grieving takes on our lives. These conditions each require time to recover from the initial shock and finality of death. As with other Oregon employers, EMO's own Employment Policy allows for regular employees to take paid time off for bereavement and additional unpaid time if necessary.

Most of us have our own personal stories of grief and loss. When I lost my mother suddenly on a family vacation in Hawaii, we were forced to wait for several days until an autopsy was performed and her body could be released from the hospital. My brother and I accompanied our grieving father on the long flight home and helped to make funeral and burial arrangements. We delayed her funeral a number of days so family members from several states could attend. All told, the process took 10 days. I chose to stay for an extra couple of days after the funeral to care for my father.

EMO supports HB 2950 because we believe that supporting families in times of need and respecting the dignity of those grieving is both moral as well as good public for the state of Oregon. We urge your support for this bill.

Respectfully,

Jan Elfers  
Public Policy Associate  
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon