

Testimony in Support of HB 3390

April 2, 2013

Dear Chair Dougherty and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding HB 3390. I am a family physician, and have worked in community health clinics serving low income families in Oregon for the past 13 years.

In my years of primary care practice, I saw many families who would have benefited from a paid sick leave policy. Low-wage workers struggle to find both employment and child care that meets their needs, and they are often constantly battling to hold the basic logistics of their family lives together. I saw many patients who had to choose between staying home with a sick child (or staying home because of their own illness) and keeping their job. There were several families who described needing to leave their children in unsafe situations (like with neighbors they were not sure they could trust) because the children were ill and could not go to daycare, but the parent could not take time off work. In particular, I remember one of my patients, a low-income single woman who was pregnant and clearly needed a C-section, but asked me not to do it. Her plan had been to deliver her baby and be back at her job within a week, and she was afraid that if we did surgery she wouldn't be able to return to work so quickly and she would lose her job. Not doing the C-section seriously jeopardized her health and her baby's health, but proceeding with it would seriously jeopardize her financial status and her housing, which would have an even bigger impact on the health of both mother and baby.

As a physician and a public health professional, it is frustrating to know that even when I recommend time off from work for an ill patient, and the patient agrees that is what they need, there is no reasonable way for that to happen. Instead, many ill adults and children show up in workplaces and child care settings, spreading infections like the flu and gastroenteritis, so that families can continue getting the paychecks they so desperately need to stay afloat. In turn, those illnesses spread to more families who find themselves in the same position. This is a health inequity. High-income earners do not deal with this issue at near the same rate as low-income workers do.

This proposal to offer paid sick leave is a strong step in the right direction. It says that we value the health and well-being of all our families. It says that we, as a state, want to ensure that all our residents are empowered to take care of themselves and their children without being financially burdened for it. It says that when we make decisions, we do our best to align those decisions with good public health practices. I strongly urge you to support paid sick leave for Oregon residents.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully,

Helen K. Bellanca, MD, MPH