



FAMILY FORWARD OREGON

Smart policies for today's families.

Testimony before the Senate Workforce Committee in support of SB 454

February 16, 2015

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee,

My name is Andrea Paluso and I am the Executive Director of Family Forward Oregon, the chair of the Everybody Benefits Coalition, and the co-chair of Fair Shot for All.

I want to share with you a story that causes me great concern, one that I have now heard from more than one Oregon mother. One that involves these mothers keeping a sick kid in their car, surrounded by toys and blankets, but parked outside the mother's workplace so she could keep an eye on that child when they were sick without losing her job. No Oregon mother should be placed in this unjustifiable situation.

Women are more likely to work in the kinds of jobs that do not have paid sick time – retail, food service, child care, home health care and others. They are more likely to work in part-time jobs without even the most basic of benefits. They are also more likely to need access to paid time off to take care of themselves and the kids and other family members who often rely on them.

We were thrilled to see Portland and Eugene pass paid sick time laws that ensure everyone working in those cities can earn and use sick time to recover from illness, take care of a sick child, or seek preventive care. Those cities took a major step to ensure that nobody working in their communities would be fired for the flu, that no kids would need to stay parked in mom's car, or home with their older sibling who also misses school, or stuck at school sick. They worked to ensure that people working in restaurants and grocery stores could stay home instead of spreading illness to others. They ensured that when people need health care they have the time they need to access it when they are supposed to – often during a work day – instead of relying on more expensive emergency and urgent care services.

Yet despite the historic laws in those two cities, still 47% of Oregonians working in the private-sector do not earn paid sick time at work. That's true for 71% of Oregonians earning low-wages.

The arguments against needed labor and workplace standards like paid sick time are always the same: costs will rise, benefits will be cut, businesses will flee the state, the government is over-reaching, it harms small business or new businesses, too much bureaucracy, and the list goes on and on. These exact arguments were made around workplace safety standards, child labor laws, the establishment of the minimum wage – and during every major debate about working conditions that this country has ever seen. Despite this, the market continues to operate, businesses continue to flourish, and employers continue to adapt to new standards in remarkably efficient ways.

The bill before you today is not only about an employers' bottom line, though it doesn't discount the importance of it either. It is about multiple bottom lines, those of workers struggling to make ends meet and those of employers who are doing the right thing in an environment that discourages it. It is about the community's bottom line when disease spreads or health care costs increase. It is about public health, and economic justice, and equity.

The process that prepared us for consideration of SB 454 has been a long and inclusive one. We began conversations about this issue with some of the legislators here today over four years ago. Over the last three years, and through our work to pass ordinances in Portland and Eugene, we have had tens of thousands of conversations with citizens, business owners, affected workers, advocates, parents, teachers, and many others. We have engaged in dozens of policy discussions, forums and town halls. The bill before you today was shaped by three different business, labor, advocate and legislator work group processes held in Portland, in Eugene, and over the last 18 months with leadership from Representative Vega Pederson and Senator Steiner Hayward. It was also shaped by what we have learned by following the design and implementation of paid sick time laws in 15 cities and 3 states across the country.

In practice, this bill would require Oregon employers to allow all of their employees to earn 1 hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours they work, up to 56 hours per year. It allows employees to use this sick time to recover from illness or to address issues related to domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault. It allows employees use of their paid sick time to address the health needs of a family member. And it allows for use of the time to receive preventive and mental health care. Employers are encouraged to do better than the basic floor that this law would create, but they are not required to.

Through our work groups we have identified ways in which an employer can identify and take action in the case of abuse by employees, we have clarified administrative and record-keeping requirements, we shifted language that allows shift trading for tipped employees, and we lengthened the period under which employees provide notice for foreseeable absences. We also strengthened provisions for front-loading sick time each year, something that allows for less administration by employers. Most importantly we have outlined specifically that if an employer is already allowing their employees to earn 56 hours of paid time off - that can be used for the purposes required by this law - they do not need to add any additional hours.

A paid sick time law is critical in addressing public health and economic security issues that people across the state experience right now. It also works to create the kind of Oregon where more of us can prosper, take care of our families, and keep our jobs. It ensures the basic dignity that comes with working in a job where you can take care of yourself when you're sick without losing the income your family relies on. At its core, this law is about how we believe working families in our state should be treated. And I know none of us wants to live in a state where mothers – like those I've already mentioned – are forced to choose between what is best for their sick child or the job that makes providing for that child possible.

I urge you to support this bill on behalf of the many organizations working together to create a statewide sick time standard, organizations that are listed on the attachment that accompanies this testimony.

Thank you.