



February 16, 2015

Chair Dembrow and members of the committee,

Thank you for having me before you today. I am Heather Conroy and serve as the elected executive director of SEIU 503. We represent 55,000 working women and men across Oregon who provide vital services like maintaining our roads, providing hands on, in home care to seniors and people with developmental disabilities so they can live with autonomy and dignity, protecting our environment, serving families in need and dozens of other publicly funded services.

I'm here to speak in favor of statewide sick leave for all workers. I speak in favor of this bill because it is not only a smart economic decision, its also the right moral decision. This is an economic issue but it is also an issue that is deeply rooted in our values and our humanity. This is about how we treat on another, how we respect one another and putting our money where our mouth is when talking about family values.

I can recall being a waitress in Pennsylvania when my employer was paying me \$2.13/hour - still the minimum wage for tipped workers in PA and many other states - had no paid leave or access to healthcare. I remember the pain, embarrassment and the desperation I felt when I ended up with a nasty UTI. With no access to healthcare and no time off I continued to go to work sick and in pain. I tried to remedy it with the help of an herbalist to no avail and in the end learned through the grapevine of a pediatrician who would open his practice to folks like me who needed help and would provide free samples of antibiotics. I couldn't miss work because I needed every penny I was earning to make rent and eat. I had no access to paid time off the way many of us here today, including me, now enjoy.

SEIU 503 is in support of this bill because too many people have experiences like I just described including many of our members. I'd like to tell you about Annie. Annie is a homecare worker in Portland, and like a large number of homecare workers she is a grandmother, she is a widow and she is poor. She has been a worker for over fifty years. Annie was raised in the segregated south - in Mississippi and is the daughter of sharecroppers. After getting kicked out of school at the age of 16 for getting pregnant she began working. After declaring that she was done picking cotton she got a job as a waitress in a restaurant in Vicksburg where they were hiring young black women to dress in Aunt

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Jemima costumes to serve tourists coming to experience the south. As a young, single mother she fought for the end of Jim Crow and the right to vote. Fast forward 30 or so years later after Annie moved to Northeast Portland and married. When her husband became ill she began her career as a homecare worker caring for him. She was paid close to minimum wage, had no paid time off, no benefits - even her taxes weren't taken out of her check. Homecare workers, like too many other workers in our state, were invisible and being taken advantage of by a system that relied on their kindness and compassion. Based on Annie's experiences in the civil rights movement, she knew when the union organizer knocked on her door that things could change and she joined right away.

After Annie's husband passed she continued to work as a homecare worker. She was unable to keep her family home in Northeast Portland and was forced to move to an apartment in Rockwood. She relies on Tri-Met to get down to Old Town to care for seniors who are living in low-income apartments. Through her union she has fought for and won access to four days paid time off but that is clearly not enough. With only four paid days off per year, when Annie got news that her daughter in Mississippi was diagnosed with breast cancer she had to rely on the generosity of friends and family to be able to be where she belonged in that moment - at her daughters side. Without access to adequate paid time off Annie faced choosing between risking her job, not being able to make her rent and doing what mothers are to do - support their children when faced with crisis.

We are better than that. Oregon is better than that. We believe in human dignity, we believe in the value of work, we believe in families. That is why SEIU 503 urges you to pass sick leave for all Oregon workers.