

February 5, 2016

To: House Business and Labor Committee

From: Sarai Johnson

Re: Support of HB 4088

Good morning Chair Holvey and Committee Members,

My name is Sarai Johnson, I am a mother of two boys, and I live in Eugene. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

During both of my pregnancies I worked in a professional, upper management position with a regional nonprofit. When I became pregnant with my second child, I was the second in command, yet my boss made comments such as "Are you going to be a stay-at-home mom now?" and other things that felt threatening to me. I felt obligated to overcompensate for my pregnancy, and worked 60 to 80 hours a week. As my due date approached, I needed time for rest for myself and the baby. I was able to take the time off, but my request was met with hostility and I knew my boss didn't like it.

I left work for maternity leave about three weeks before my due date, as I had signs of early labor and was concerned for the health of my baby. It was clear that my boss was not happy that I was taking the time off, and because of her veiled threats and antagonism I ended up working from home almost full time in that period. I was very concerned about my ability to keep my job, and as a result, I went back to work part time when the baby was just one week old, and full time when he was two weeks old.

When I had been back to work for a few weeks my boss significantly changed my duties, though I kept my title and salary. Again, I felt not only unsupported but threatened. I went to work every day, with my baby, in spite of the growing sense of hostility I faced from my boss, who both wanted me there and resented my newborn baby being with me in the office.

When my baby was 8 weeks old the organization made a policy change: no more babies in the office. I had to scramble to find a nanny -- an expense I had not planned -- who took my baby nearly full time for four weeks until he could go to daycare at 12 weeks.

My experience of hostility and impatience, disdain and frustration from my boss and other management during this time was in contrast to the experience a coworker had around the same time, related to her own health. She was diagnosed with cancer, and in response, was given an open door for scheduling her appointments and taking extended leave, during which time she was not expected to continue working from home. Of course, I felt this was fair and entirely appropriate, though I was aware of the stark difference in our experiences.

Circumstances continued to be tense at work as my baby grew into a toddler, particularly when it came to me taking time off to care for him, or his brother, when they were ill. While it was begrudgingly allowed taking time off to care for my sick kids was always looked upon with disdain and was generally frowned upon. In the fall of 2014, after 6.5 years with the company I finally chose to leave, in no small part because I didn't feel my family caregiving needs could be accommodated without a continuous fight and risk to my standing and position.

Too many women are treated with hostility and threats at work when they have children. A familial status discrimination law could go a long way toward improving working conditions and I share this painful experience with you today in the hope of making things better for other women. Thank you.