



Melissa Erlbaum, MPA
Executive Director

March 23, 2017
House Committee On Early Childhood and Family Supports

Re: Support for HB 3087

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs Piluso and Hack, and Members of House Committee On Early Childhood and Family Supports:

My name is Melissa Erlbaum, and I am the executive director of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS), a community-based non-profit agency that has supported survivors of domestic and sexual violence, stalking, and elder abuse on their pathways to safety and stability for over 30 years.

As both an employer and service provider, CWS is a staunch supporter of paid family leave legislation. For our employees — the vast majority of whom are women and serve as the primary caregivers for their families — our agency's paid parental leave policy affords them the opportunity to recuperate, bond, and provide care to their children following childbirth or adoption. Witnessing firsthand the need and positive effect of this policy for my employees, I strongly believe that the women we serve should also have access this critical support.

Unfortunately, this is not an option for the vast majority of survivors, who are often the least likely to work for companies with a paid family leave policy. The absence of this serves as yet another impediment to safety for women and children fleeing violence and abuse. For instance, pregnancy is one of the most dangerous times for women, and lack of paid family leave after the birth of a child may take away from their only income source, effectively compromising their economic, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Consequently, I firmly believe that the implementation of state-wide paid family leave policy is vital to removing one of the greatest barriers to survivor safety.

The need for paid family leave is stark and long overdue, both in Oregon and nationally. Currently, the United States is one of only four countries globally — as well as the only industrialized nation — that does not provide paid maternity leave for employees. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, only 11% of employees have access to paid family leave, very few of whom are the low-wage workers most desperately in need of it. Further, in the state of Oregon, according to findings from Institute for Women's Policy Research, while 60% of workers have access to unpaid family and medical leave through the Oregon Family and Medical Leave Act (OFLA), many simply cannot afford to take the unpaid leave available to them. Sadly, the millions of Oregonians and Americans who are ineligible to take to the job-protected and unpaid leave through FMLA or OFLA, are at considerable risk of losing their income source during one of the most stressful —and oftentimes costly —periods of their lives.

Paid Family and Medical Leave programs serve as a cornerstone to economic security and health outcomes for women and their families. These policies are desperately needed, as their absence disproportionately burdens the most vulnerable, especially low-income women and victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Your support of HB 3087 will provide much needed safety and stability supports, enabling millions of Oregonians to take time to care for their families without fear.



Melissa Erlbaum, MPA
Executive Director

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Erlbaum', written in a cursive style.

Melissa Erlbaum
CWS Executive Director