

Chair Lively and members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sarai Johnson, I am a working mother, and I live in Eugene. I am here today because paid family leave is critical to the health and economic security of families like mine.

When I was pregnant with my second child, I worked in a professional, upper management position with a regional nonprofit. I left work for maternity leave about three weeks before my due date, as I had signs of early labor and was concerned for my baby's health. However, due to hostility from my boss and implications that my job performance was being judged based on my need to attend to my health and that of my baby, and my care giving responsibilities at home, I ended up working from home almost full time in that period. This was incredibly stressful, and not the rest I needed.

Because I was so concerned about losing my job, I went back to work part time when my newborn baby was just one week old, and full time when he was two weeks old.

Daycares do not take one-week-old babies. At first, I managed by taking my baby to the office with me. Then, when he was 8 weeks old, my employer made a sudden policy change: no more babies in the office. I had to find a nanny – an expense I had not planned for -- who took my baby nearly full time for the four weeks until daycare would take him at the minimum age of 12 weeks.

Too many women are forced back to work within 2 weeks of having a baby, as I was. In fact, 25% of mothers in this country are back at work within 2 weeks. We are back at work at a time when our babies need our full-time emotional and physical attention. Most women are not even physically recovered from birth after 2 weeks. Child care centers don't take infants that young. The resulting stress is terrible for newborns and it is terrible for parents. It is also caustic for the workplace.

Too many people are treated with hostility, judgment, and threats at work when they have children. Paid family leave would make a huge difference. First, it would mean that people could afford to actually take leave without fear of going into long-term debt. Second, paid family leave will help build a culture in the workplace that is more supportive of people's family caregiving responsibilities.

I share this painful experience in the hope of making things better for others in the future. Please pass HB 3087. Oregonians need paid family and medical leave.