

Chair Lively and members of the committee,

I'd like to begin by thanking the committee for allowing me to offer my testimony in support of House Bill 3087.

When I got pregnant with my first child in April 2013, I had been working full time and paying taxes for about 10 years and yet, I didn't have benefits or health insurance. The job market was rough after the 2008 recession, so I took whatever work I could use my degree on, usually in the form of working several part-time jobs at once - or "freelancing" a full-time job -- with no benefits or health insurance.

My current employer hired me when I was 5 months pregnant and I finally got health insurance at that point but, because I hadn't worked there long enough and because the company wasn't big enough, I was not qualified for paid family leave by law. I was at the mercy of my employer to make that decision. He said he would think about it and let me know when my pregnancy was nearing the end. This caused me great stress and uncertainty during my pregnancy. I went to work even when I was sick or weak because I was trying to save my sick days for after I gave birth, in case they didn't give me any paid time off. Without getting paid while I was away recovering from childbirth, we would have become homeless because we had no way of paying our rent.

A few days before going into labor, my boss told me they would give me 8 weeks of paid time off to recover from childbirth if I signed a document saying I would come back after 8 weeks instead of 12. I had no choice but to sign it, considering my financial situation. Childbirth was rough for me. I ended up in the ER and almost died. I had to have four blood transfusions and be hospitalized in very bad shape. Nonetheless, around two weeks postpartum, I was feeling pressured to work from home because my boss signed on my maternity leave even though he didn't have to. So I started putting in work whenever I could even prior to my official return after 8 weeks. I ended up with postpartum depression and paralyzing anxiety, which affected both the bonding with my child and my relationship with her father.

With no nearby family to help and no ability to afford childcare, the birth of our child and years immediately after was the most stressful time in our life -- an occasion that's normally supposed to be a reason for joy, celebration, and happiness. Her father and I ultimately broke up. The breakup, combined with my declining health and issues at work (not the most female- or mom-friendly environment) put a strain on our family and was not a healthy environment for our baby's brain development.

All of this could have been avoided with a simple, standardized way to provide Paid Family Leave for Oregon's hard working families and align us with the rest of the world who has recognized the importance of it for a long time now. Can I count on your support to pass House Bill 3087.

Sabina Urdes  
Portland OR

