



Testimony in Support of House Bill 3087

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House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 3087. My name is Alan Helyer and I am a retired occupational health nurse and member of the Oregon Nurses Association. In my years providing care in this field, I have had plenty of experiences seeing families' very real need for time off work for birth of a new baby, or to take care of a sick child or aging parent. I will assume as legislators that you are familiar with the wide-range of arguments in support of this bill. Rather than recite them to you, I want to share four stories of families I have personally worked with.

One employee and his wife had twins with their first pregnancy. The mother was employed elsewhere so I am not sure of her benefits. However she suffered from severe post-partum depression and was not faring well with having to be the stay at home caregiver. The father had a low- paying job, so he could not afford to take unpaid Family Medical Leave – even though it was clear to me that he desperately needed it. This placed significant strain on their marriage and after some time, led to a nearly violent incident between the couple, who were enduring great psychological stress. Ultimately, police were involved following this event and I became involved to help keep the husband out of jail. This crisis was ultimately averted after reassuring the police of the circumstances and helping the individual to get counseling through an Employee Assistance Program. Access to paid family leave could have made an important impact in helping to prevent this trauma.

Another employee I came into contact with was a PhD Chemist. Her family brought her to America from India while she was a small child. She had a difficult first pregnancy and a slow recovery after her child was born. When her paid medical benefits were running out for maternal leave after six weeks, she was not physically or mentally ready to return to work. Her supervisor thought she was a valuable employee and looked forward to her return but was concerned that if she could not concentrate appropriately at work, she would be endangering herself and those around her with a chemical spill or even an explosion. We were lucky in this instance because her supervisor and I were able to convince her medical case manager to provider with two more weeks of medical leave. That made all the difference. Over the next three years, she did not miss anytime from work. While this may seem like an excessive amount of time off work in the U.S.A., in Europe employees are offered up to a year of paid family medical leave – and research studies show that they routinely have better outcomes than we do as a result.

I also encountered numerous families where the sole breadwinner was a single mom with kids at home, no family support, who also had to take care of aging parents. They exhausted their meager sick-leave and vacation time to take kids or parents in for medical care. They lived from hand to mouth, so they could not afford to take unpaid family medical leave. Sometimes they did when their only other choice was to quit or lose their job. Every one of these women were good hardworking employees who were doing their personal best within challenging circumstance. They just needed more meaningful support and paid family medical leave could well have met that need.

Finally, a friend of mine had once been laid off following the birth of his daughter. He received unemployment benefits and his wife had medical insurance from her employer. In a sense, he had “unpaid Family Medical Leave” to bond with this new born child. Just like the research studies report, he closely bonded with both of his children during this period and is still very much involved with their care seven years later.

We in our country have broken our social contract over the last forty years. We used to invest in our businesses, workers, customers, and communities. Worker incomes used to go up as profits rose. Instead, wages have been basically stagnant for decades as the cost of living has increased steadily. The need for earned paid Family Medical Leave remains very real. This bill involves relatively little cost to the state compared to the immeasurable benefits that employees, their families, and the business will realize from the investment. Long-standing research from our universities as well as the U.S. Department of Labor confirm that women return to work and stay on the job longer than women who do not take Family Medical Leave. In turn, families are healthier when they have affordable access to paid leave and our workforce misses less time from employment over the long-term. HB 3087 is a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to providing paid leave for all families in our state to achieve these improved health outcomes.

I urge your support for HB 3087.