



## **Testimony in Support of House Bill 3087**

March 23, 2017

House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports

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Chair Lively and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association, I respectfully request your support for HB 3087, the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act. ONA is the professional organization for registered nurses in Oregon, providing policy, practice and workplace leadership throughout the state.

As a Certified nurse Midwife with nearly 40 years of experience working with pregnant women and new mothers, I see the importance of creating stability for young families through paid family leave following childbirth. Currently, both the federal Family Medical Leave Act and its Oregon equivalent, the Oregon Family Leave Act, provide job protection for up to 12 weeks. Yet, today I see women who are forced to make difficult decisions about bonding with their newborns and continuing breastfeeding versus returning to work to keep a roof over their family and food on the table. The more we learn about the early weeks and months of a newborn's life, the more we understand the importance of parental presence.

Exclusive breast feeding provides a long-term health benefit of decreasing rates of childhood obesity and diabetes, leukemia and ear infections, to name a few. The bond created by a mother and her breastfeeding infant promotes both healthy attachment and lower rates of maternal depression. Healthy attachment also supports brain development in the infant. Babies cared for in the initial weeks by their mothers typically hear more words and receive more healthy stimulation. Both of these are positive indicators for later academic and professional success.

In my experience, I witness those in the lowest-wage jobs being forced by economic pressures to return to work the soonest. Higher wage jobs might provide a disability benefit or a wage that allows for savings to cover an extended parental leave. Those at the lowest wages have neither and are forced back to work the fastest. It is one of the most difficult aspects of my work as a provider when I am asked to sign papers for a mother who is returning to work before her newborn is even 6 weeks old. In all such instances, it is most often the economic pressures of food and housing that drive these decisions.

The Oregon Nurses Association supports the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act because it will ultimately help to foster healthier families and improved child development in our communities.

**I urge your yes vote for HB 3087.**