



Testimony in Support of HB 3087

Jen Barr, DNP, FNP

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Chair Lively and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Barr and I'm writing to you today on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association to ask for your support for House Bill 3087, the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act. I cannot stress enough the importance for paid family and medical leave. I have witnessed this first hand in my line of work and experienced it personally in caring for my ill father. Only 13% of people have access to paid family and medical leave at work and Oregonians suffer from this. While current law allows for up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, this unfortunately puts Oregonians in the predicament of choosing between paying rent and putting food on the table or caring for their loved ones.

As a nurse practitioner specializing in the surgical care of children with congenital heart disease, I see parents having to make this painful decision on countless occasions. Some of those born with more complex heart disease, requiring surgical repair within the first week or so life, often have very prolonged hospital courses, lasting anywhere from one month to three or more. Mothers and fathers must make the false choice between returning to work or staying at the bedside with their newborn. Some parents have other children to care for and cannot afford to miss work. For those parents who live near the hospital, they are still able to come for a short visit; however most of our families live far from the hospital. I have often seen parents have to return to work 4+ hours away from their sick child and are only able to visit on weekends. This is truly unacceptable for both our patients and their parents. Affordable paid family leave would help to alleviate this situation.

Personally, I've also seen the effects of unpaid family leave in my own household. When I was in nursing school, my father was diagnosed with brain cancer. It was discovered after he experienced a seizure. He was told that he had to remain seizure-free for 6 months before he would be allowed to drive again, placing a significant burden on my mother and me to transport him for his daily radiation treatments, as well as weekly chemotherapy visits at a different location and monthly doctor appointments. Thankfully, my mother worked for a company that gave her the time that she needed to help with transportation. When my father entered hospice care, my mother, always a very hard worker with a strong work ethic, had banked enough sick hours that she could take the remaining three weeks that he had off work. Many other Oregonians are not as fortunate as my mother was and would have had to take this time without pay, further increasing the cost burden for things like funeral services.

It is truly unacceptable to me that we do not have a system for paid family leave in this state or in this country today. Increasingly, Oregonians are now pulling "double duty" in caring for their children as well as aging parents concurrently. If our communities want them to continue to be productive members of society, we must support them by providing affordable access to paid time off. The Oregon Nurses Association supports the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act because, too often, nurses see how devastating unpaid leave can be for a family dealing with serious medical issues or parental needs.

I urge your support for House Bill 3087.