

Statement on Maternity Leave

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My name is Evan Shereck and I am not only a mother of two young children, but am also a pediatrician.

Pediatricians have long recognized the benefits of parents caring for their own children for at least the first 12 weeks of their lives. This is a time when children are at their most vulnerable and it is critical to have a care-giver with them 24 hours a day. Unfortunately, not every one has the option to stay home and care for their new baby.

Personally, I can speak to having had my children in 2 different countries with very different family leave policies. My son was born almost 7 years ago in Vancouver, Canada. Because Canada has government-sponsored paid leave, I was able to fully care for my growing baby and myself. I could attend all my pre-natal doctor visits and take time to rest when I was feeling sick. After my son was born, I had the economic security to stay home with him for six months because that leave was paid 85%. Yes, six months 85% paid leave. I could attend to my son's every need and we had ample time to bond. When I did return to work, I was able to dive back into my career and be productive for my employer.

My daughter was born 2.5 years later, but it was a much different experience. I had just started a new job in the United States when I became pregnant. As a family, my husband and I could not afford for me to not be paid for 3 months. As a pediatrician, I knew how important it was for my baby's health that I spend this time with her. Therefore, we made the decision that for the entirety of my pregnancy, I would not utilize any vacation or sick time, no matter how sick I felt, for fear that that this would cost me my maternity leave.

Most families would not be able to afford the loss of 3 months wages to stay with their child. In order to stay home, families may need to make difficult choices such as take on extra debt, go on welfare, or return to work immediately after delivery. In these circumstances, parents are forced to choose between their financial health versus the physical and mental health of baby and parent.

It is time for Oregon to stand up and say this is not acceptable. We are a state that values families. We are also a state that values a strong workforce. By creating a family leave program, Oregon will ensure the health of its newborns while also keeping its citizens in the workforce and contributing to the state economy.