

Testimony of Charese Rohny – Support HB 3087

March 23, 2017

Chair Lively, members of the committee, my name is Charese Rohny. I live in Portland Oregon and I am testifying today in support of HB 3087 on behalf of The Main Street Alliance, on behalf of small businesses and on behalf of working families in Oregon. I own a small law firm and I represent folks who need paid leave.

Unlike a century ago, most parents today routinely work outside of the home. In 2015, 92.7% of all men with children under 18 participated in the labor force.¹ Of women who became mothers in the last year, 60% are in the workforce, 27% live in poverty.² The percentage of stay-at-home dads has increased in Oregon and nationally. The increase nationally went from about 4% in 1989 to 7% in 2012.³ Although that sounds small that's over 2 million men in the U.S. who are now stay-at-home dads.

The United States is the only member of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries without a national paid family leave program.⁴ OECD analysis suggests that the US could help working families reduce poverty rates by strengthening services and benefits for children in early years, and a key way is to legislate paid parental leave.⁵ Although we have the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA) in our state, it is estimated that only 13% of private industry employees have access to paid family leave.⁶ That 13% work at the big companies – who can afford to offer what should be a basic benefit for all employees. Without paid leave, small business lose good employees, particularly females, and experience costly turnover.

Small business owners want to do the right thing and support people who need time off to attend to a personal or family illness or take care of a new child. We know that harms can occur when parents are unable to spend time with their infants, including higher rates of infant mortality, lower rates of breastfeeding, lower rates of immunizations, and higher incidence of maternal physical and mental health concerns.

¹ Employment Characteristics of Families – 2015, Bureau of Labor Statistics (April 22, 2015) *available at* <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.nr0.htm>

² DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, FERTILITY, *available at* <https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/fertility.htm>

³ Kim Parker and Grethen Livingston, 6 facts about American fathers, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (June 16, 2016) *available at* <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/16/fathers-day-facts/> and for Oregon *see* <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2014/06/24/a-follow-up-to-stay-at-home-parents/>

⁴ *Work-Life Balance*, OECD Better Life Index, (last visited March 23, 2017) *available at* <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/>

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ 13 Percent of Private Industry Workers Had Access to Paid Family Leave in March 2016, Bureau of Labor Statistics (November 4, 2016), *available at* <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/13-percent-of-private-industry-workers-had-access-to-paid-family-leave-in-march-2016.htm>

More and more states and localities are considering paid family leave as a key policy priority. Rhode Island, California, and New Jersey are some of the states that have forged ahead and already passed paid family leave laws. Washington enacted paid leave, however it was contingent on a funding mechanism. Paid family leave in California has been around the longest. It passed in 2002, and took effect in 2004. Since then more men have taken paid leave. The number of fathers who took paid family leave increased 400% between 2005-2013. We know, and studies have shown, that participation by men during the early childhood years increases the odds that men remain closely bonded caregivers throughout their child's life.

I am emphasizing the benefits for men and much as women and children, for many reasons. One key reason: as men are more involved as caregivers women will be less burdened with the perception that they are less valuable or riskier employees to hire because of being perceived as THE primary caregivers. Equally important for women, in states that have enacted paid family leave, it is already shown that women are less likely to participate in public assistance programs. Paid leave is a means to help women overcome workplace discrimination, to help overcome the wage gap in hiring and to help reduce women in poverty or on public assistance.

I urge you

- to help Oregon's small business owners to be competitive in hiring by offering paid leave and to help us retain talent;
- to help Oregon's families better care for family needs, including during those critical early childhood time;
- to help Oregon's women by reducing the perception that women are riskier hires; and
- to help all employees have higher satisfaction in their work-life balance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.