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To: House Committee On Early Childhood and Family Supports
From: Sharon Meieran, Multnomah County Commissioner
Date: March 23, 2017
Re: HB 3087, the Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Act

Dear Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Hack and Piluso, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Act. This issue is meaningful to me personally: as a mother who had to go back to work soon after having my children; as a doctor working in the emergency room where I see the hardships faced by working families every day; and now as a Multnomah County Commissioner with an imperative to advocate for sound public policy that promotes a safe, healthy, prosperous community for the region I serve.

The United States is unique in its refusal to guarantee paid family leave—it is the only industrialized nation that doesn't mandate paid maternity leave. Nationwide, only about 10% of all workers have access to paid family leave that includes time off for caregiving. In this environment, local jurisdictions and individual employers are pressed to pick up the slack in enacting sensible workplace policies that assist families and, ultimately, help employers' bottom lines.¹

So, Multnomah County took action. In October 2015, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution providing paid parental leave to all eligible county employees following the birth, adoption, or foster care placement of a child. With this action, Multnomah County became the first government in Oregon to give employees time to bond with a new child without sacrificing their income and stability. The policy reflects thoughtful consideration of employee needs,² and underscores the county's commitment to equity.³

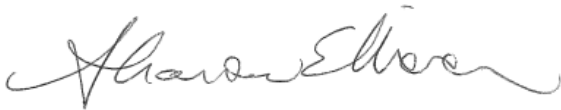
As a next step, Multnomah County is currently partnering with the OHSU-PSU School of Public Health to evaluate the implementation of the paid parental leave policy and its relationship to employee and child well-being. Using surveys, focus groups, and data analysis, the county hopes to evaluate and potentially improve the implementation process, track changes in leave-taking behavior, and understand any relationships between paid parental leave and the well-being of our employees and their children. The county anticipates this information being useful for policy implementation, workforce planning, and recruitment and retention of employees.

As an employer, Multnomah County is a leader in providing a leave package that supports parents and families, but that's not the case in many workplaces across the county. In the emergency room, I've seen parents bring their sick children in at midnight because they can't take time off during regular business hours; I've seen people with manageable health conditions that have turned into emergencies, who tell me they had to return to work sooner than their doctor recommended; and I've cared for seniors boarding in the emergency room, who end up going to nursing facilities

because their families don't have the time off to support them.

All employees deserve access to paid family and medical leave, including parental leave, time to seek essential preventive care, and time to seek medical treatment when they are ill. The FMLI Act is an opportunity to provide an essential, long overdue workplace protection for Oregonians— while at the same time fairly distributing the costs *and* benefits among employers and employees. Thank you for taking up this issue, and considering my testimony.

Sincerely,



Sharon Meieran

¹ *The median cost of replacing an employee is roughly 21% of their annual salary, and, in a survey of two hundred human resource managers, two-thirds cited family-supportive policies as the single most important factor in attracting and retaining employees.*

Unbending Gender: Why Work and Family Conflict and What to Do About It. *Oxford University Press*, Williams (2001)

² *In April 2015 the county surveyed all county employees regarding their preferences for county help with child care. Seventy percent of the respondents who said they do or will use child care in the next five years identified paid parental leave, combined with a discount at local childcare providers, as their preferred county childcare benefit (over access to a county-subsidized child care center).*

³ *Access to unpaid leave does not equate to the ability to actually take leave; this is especially true among lower income workers and those who are primary breadwinners. According to a 2014 analysis by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as a result of employer size, job tenure or part-time work status, nearly 40 percent of the workforce is excluded from laws protecting unpaid leave, including the Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA) or the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Studies show that even when people are eligible for unpaid leave they often cannot afford to take it. According to one national report, just under 80 percent of eligible workers who did not take FMLA leave said that they would have had it been paid. This unmet need for paid leave is nearly twice as great among women, workers of color, unmarried workers, and low-wage workers than among their respective counterparts (https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/08/pdf/medical_leave_factsheet.pdf). Women of color, in particular, are more likely than their white counterparts to be a single head-of-household, where the needs for both family care and stable income are greater.*