



March 18, 2020

Chairs Roblan, Holvey, and Members of the Committee -

Thank you for your work to protect and support Oregonians as we face the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 in our communities. Family Forward Oregon is committed to advancing policies that support mothers, caregivers and their families and help them achieve and sustain economic stability. Of course, we are gravely concerned about the impacts this pandemic is and will have on mothers, caregivers and the families who rely upon them.

We call on you to take all the measures necessary to ensure that our families, many of whom are already living in or near poverty, can weather this health and economic crisis. Many of our members and leaders are already feeling the health and economic impacts of this global pandemic, one which has magnified the various existing cracks in all our health, economic and safety net systems.

We are signed on to other joint letters that address other extremely important and emergent issues, but we are choosing to focus here on the areas where we have expertise and are able to offer insight for the legislature.

In order to ensure the short and long-term well-being of our families and our economy we ask that you address the following sets of issues:

Ensure that Oregonians can comply with public health directives by giving them paid leave, job protection and other income replacements

- Paid Family and Medical Leave:
 - Extend Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA) protections under ORS 659a.150 et seq. to all workers regardless of employer size, hours worked, job tenure or part-time or seasonal work status.
 - Relax OFLA medical verification requirements and allow a person to take OFLA without medical verification to self-quarantine.
- Paid Sick Time:
 - Expand Oregon's Paid Sick Time protections under ORS 653.601 et seq. by lifting the local preemption, allowing local governments to support workers as needed.
 - Cover all workers with *paid* sick time regardless of employer size, waiving documentation requirements to prove illness, allowing workers to borrow from future sick time if they haven't reached the 90 day threshold or if they have used up their sick time.
 - Provide 14 days of paid leave during public health emergencies.
- Unemployment Insurance:

- Extend Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits under ORS 657 to workers who are quarantined and lack paid sick leave or have insufficient paid sick time to cover the quarantine period.
- Waive work search requirements during the emergency. Clarify that “good cause” to quit a job includes being forced to perform duties that jeopardize workers’ health, and needing to leave a job in order to care for family.
- Allow UI for workers who are still employed but unable to work due to a temporary business closure.
- Waive the one-week waiting period for UI benefits.
- Workers Compensation:
 - Ensure automatic approval for a Workers’ Compensation claim under ORS 656 if there is a documented case of COVID-19 at a worker’s place of employment. Ensure Workers’ Compensation benefits are at salary for essential workers in health care and disaster response fields. “Essential workers” applies to the childcare providers caring for the children of health care workers and disaster responders.
- Protect our immigrant families with mixed status families from suffering any adverse consequences for seeking health care and other critical economic supports.

Support families who need child care now; and protect providers to ensure we can sustain our already limited supply in the future

- Grant emergency child care assistance to all parents and caregivers required to work during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Temporarily remove Employment-Related Day Care (ERDC) income eligibility limits to allow all those who need it to receive child care subsidies.
- Allow temporary enrollment of parents who are entering or re-entering the workforce in health care and disaster response jobs (and associated childcare jobs) during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Allow continued enrollment of parents who change their childcare provider. The primary child care provider may be closed, or the parent’s location of work may have changed, or the parent’s work schedule may have changed.
- Temporarily ease regulatory requirements on substitute and Friend, Family, and Neighbor Care (FFN) providers. Ease background checks and training requirements to address the emergency shortage of providers and the unique child care needs of rural communities.
- Temporarily suspend redetermination of family eligibility for child care services to ensure that temporary changes in family workforce participation, earnings, or other factors due to COVID-19 do not impact family eligibility.



Protect child care providers and their small businesses

- Maintain the availability of child care. When childcare providers are small business owners, we must protect their sustainability—and create additional capacity—when their services are most needed.
- Adjust subsidy payment policies to be based on child care enrollment rather than attendance. Waive any policies that terminate eligibility for subsidies based on attendance. This will allow sick parents and children to stay home, and avoid the spread of infection, without disrupting revenue for childcare providers.
- Allow childcare providers to waive co-pays for families impacted by changes to their own work schedules and income, and adjust reimbursement rates accordingly to prevent loss of income for the childcare provider. Institute a ban on furloughs and salary reductions for the staff of providers receiving subsidy payments.
- Open emergency child and youth care centers for children of healthcare workers, disaster service workers, and families in public housing as the City and County of San Francisco have already done.
- Help childcare providers cover the costs of maintaining their operations safely during this time, including necessary sanitation equipment, supplies and services; substitute caregivers; paid leave for affected staff; copayments for coronavirus tests; grants to cover operational costs in the event of closure; and other expenses providers and educators will occur as the result of coronavirus spread.
- Provide child care providers and small business owners with small business assistance emergency grants and wage replacement during closures and/or to compensate them for reduced business during this crisis.

Invest in debt relief and basic services to help those in crisis

- Pass an emergency rent forgiveness order for all workers whose income stream is impacted by COVID-19 through September 2020, and reassess monthly as the situation evolves.
- Place a temporary stoppage on evictions resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic through September 2020 (and reassess monthly thereafter) and implement stringent emergency rent controls for all units, as the City of Portland has done.
- Provide financial support for non-profit housing providers who rely on rent payments, to ensure their critical services remain in operation.
- Infuse state resources for temporary housing, especially housing to protect unsheltered individuals or those living in shelters (ORS 401.185)
- Create a mortgage relief fund for families earning below Oregon's self-sufficiency standard to receive financial assistance through September 2020, and reassess monthly thereafter.
- Advocate that lenders and banks freeze mortgage payments for families earning below Oregon's self-sufficiency threshold.



- Establish a statewide moratorium on utility shut offs and late fees. The big utilities in the urban parts of the state have said they won't charge late fees or disconnect. We must extend this benefit statewide, similar to the severe weather moratorium on residential gas or electric shut offs.
- Provide increased access to food vouchers to be made available at DMV locations, food banks and schools.
- Provide financial support for transit systems to provide free transit for workers who must continue to commute.
- Ask the federal government to grant an open enrollment period on the healthcare exchange marketplace to ensure that Oregonians who are ineligible for OHP and are uninsured can sign up for health insurance in light of the pandemic.
- Waive any fees or copayments related to testing for COVID-19 as was done in New York State and provide financial support for any uninsured individuals who must seek medical care if they contract the virus.

Thank you and we look forward to being your partners as we, as a state, figure out how to move ahead during this unprecedented crisis.

Submitted by Lili Hoag on behalf of Family Forward Oregon