

March 25, 2019

To: The House Business and Labor Committee and the Senate Workforce Committee
From: Teresa Nicola
Re: Support of HB 3031

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am an individual who deeply values holistic health for my family. During my pregnancy, I was employed by a company that did health screenings and epigenetic testing. Not having PFML negatively impacted the health of my whole family.

While preparing for my baby in 2016, I was shocked to discover that the United States was the only developed nation in the world that didn't have a universal paid maternity leave. I spent time (time could have spent resting and nurturing myself and my baby) reading up on Oregon laws and drafting a maternity leave proposal to my employer. I discovered that I wasn't protected by the national Family Medical Leave Act or OFLA, because the company I worked for had under 25 employees.

My job was terminated in my 3rd trimester (I was with the company for 2.5 years prior to that). I lost my health insurance a month before my baby was due. I was living paycheck to paycheck. I called people I used to do home organizing for and picked up a small organizing job. I hurt my back on the job, but I earned enough money to pay the next month's rent.

So, I started a GoFundMe campaign to support my maternity leave (no mother should have to hustle and become a marketing and crowdsourcing expert over night). I moved into a low income apartment in the Pearl on the day my son was born and had a home birth. My labor threatened to stall when I worried about how I'd provide for my son as single-income mom. The lack of support I knew I would face during my postpartum scared me more than giving birth naturally without medication.

I spent my postpartum on the phone from 8am-5pm (sometimes experiencing 2 hour holds) trying to secure insurance, food and resources, while I was simultaneously learning how to breastfeed and care for my newborn.

I was anemic - 90 is the normal range for iron levels, and I was at 18 (you start feeling tired when it hits 30). I could barely stand up and hold my baby.

3 months postpartum I rushed my son's father to the ER; he almost died from an undiagnosed liver infection.

The next weekend I moved in with my parents, because it was clear I wouldn't be able to recover fast enough physically in order to find a new job in time and afford to stay in my apartment.

Not only was I going to need to eventually transition back to work, but I was going to have to find, interview for, land, and learn a *new* job. Most new mothers have a hard enough time transitioning back to work at companies, in roles, and with co-workers they are familiar with!

Then, we had more medical and life issues: 4 months postpartum my son's father leaves the country to train (he's an Olympic level runner, but didn't have an income due to injuries). My son developed colic, and we went through a sleep regression. I averaged 2-3 hours of sleep in a 24 hour period for 15 months. My back went out, and I was unable to pick up my son. 5 months postpartum my son's father tells me he's getting back together with his ex-girlfriend, and I experience heartache.

7 months postpartum, I am down to my very last dollar and unemployment finally kicks in (the employment bureau and IRS had to investigate, because my employer misclassified me as an independent contractor when I had been functioning as an employee).

I had lactation issues because of all the financial and situational stress. Luckily, my family helped me pay for a lactation consultant and nursing supplements, so I could continue to nurse my baby (breast milk being a matchless natural nutritional source).

After 2 years of self-advocating and struggle, I finally received the back taxes that my employer should have paid on my behalf.

All of this struggle was on top of the intense physical, emotional, hormonal, psychological, and social changes that occur during pregnancy and postpartum.

The only reasons why my son and I are living and breathing today is because my family was able to take us in and because of the Oregon Health Plan (being able to see a chiropractor, acupuncturist, naturopathic doctor, and therapist).

I am a college educated, hard working, savvy, resourceful woman. Yet it doesn't matter how privileged, smart and talented a woman is when our current lack of policy makes it almost impossible for the majority of women, their families, and our economy to thrive. New mothers shouldn't be in survival mode.

Having paid family medical leave during my baby's first three months would have greatly lessened my stress: during pregnancy, during laboring, and certainly during postpartum. It would've allowed me a more peaceful bonding experience with my son and a more easeful time with nursing.

It's common for women to be depleted after giving birth; there's a loss of fluids, organs are displaced, tissues often tear...women need adequate time for our bodies to recover. I urge you to pass paid family medical leave so no family has to go through the added stress of finances during these critical first few months.

We are all here, because one way or another, we came through a woman. It's time we value, respect and honor women and the fruit of their labors.