

March 27, 2019

To: The House Business and Labor Committee and the Senate Workforce Committee
From: Jenny Dempsey Stein
Re: Support of HB 3031

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jenny Dempsey Stein and I live in Portland, Oregon.

Having paid family medical leave would have greatly helped me recover physically and financially after the birth of my second child. Because of lack of having this at the time, after 13 years, I still haven't recovered. 13 years ago I was working part-time at a government agency while I was pregnant with my second child. I had arranged 6 weeks of leave- mostly unpaid, and was still paying daycare expenses to hold the spot for my first child. After labor, I felt great and my child was thriving. However, in the fifth week I was initially misdiagnosed, sent home, then had a dramatic postpartum hemorrhage from a partially retained placenta. I was taken from my home in an ambulance and the attendant said that she "saw too many women in this situation". Our nurse neighbor suckled my baby overnight to stop her from crying, while I was at the hospital. Within a week I was back to work because I had already arranged to have 6 weeks leave total. I was terribly pale and weak due to blood loss, fatigue and breastfeeding. We had no in-town family and few friends able to help. We survived financially because I held onto my administrative job, but the personal costs were high and I felt unsupported.

Health complications ensued. I especially suffered when I was pumping my breast milk at work or breastfeeding for months after the hemorrhage. I would feel weak and brain fogs would persist for a half an hour, maybe more. I would temporarily lose the ability to make intelligent or even any conversation with people. I pulled away socially and professionally for months. Other mothers at the playground would try to converse with me, and likely thought I was odd for not replying or saying a coherent sentence.

Later that year I took another month or so of mostly unpaid leave to visit my ailing mother with my infant, in another state. I was never fully or proactively treated by my health provider for the subsequent blood loss or related symptoms and suffered from chronically low iron levels for more than a decade, despite my best efforts with supplementation and diet. Insurance did not cover more helpful treatments, which would have increased my overall energy and wellbeing.

My health and career have never really recovered after 13 years. When my younger child was 2.5, I finally left the workforce to give myself more time to recover and enjoy my children's childhoods. I was emotionally and physically burned out from the last 3+ years. There were no other part time opportunities at my workplace, so my choices were limited. Since this time my children have thrived and thankfully my husband's career is intact. I have not been able to secure permanent work in my field since that job, and despite attending graduate school, consulting, volunteering and completing relevant internships, it is all still a serious struggle. I know I am not alone.

What I value most beside my family, my health and global ecological integrity, is the concept of personal and parental well being in a free and just society. Parents need to be well supported physically and emotionally, including in the workplace. Of course parents will universally sacrifice aspects of their lives and have struggles, but many of these are

preventable in a more humane culture and economic system. This is why I shared my story with the Human Rights Watch journalists about 10 years ago, who published a report available on their website, regarding the effects of not having paid family leave, so that eventually stories like mine will not happen anymore.

Sincerely,

Jenny Dempsey Stein