

March 25, 2019

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dacia Grayber and I live in Portland, OR.

I am a firefighter and paramedic, and have been caring for members of my community for nearly two decades now. I have also volunteered with the houseless population in the Portland metro region, and this year opened up a medical care clinic—the “Compassionate Care Center”—at the St. Anthony’s Severe Weather Shelter in Tigard. The story I am going to tell you is not my own, so I am going to change the names, but I assure you it is 100% true.

Let me introduce you to Ben and Mary. I met them the very first week that I had opened the clinic. Formerly low-income residents of a small apartment, Mary and Ben were houseless now after having to make a terrible decision. Ben had been diagnosed with Stage 4 Colon cancer recently, and they could not afford to both cover the cost of his treatments and stay in their home if Mary was to take care of him and spend what remaining time they had together. They were somehow making the treatments financially on their very limited health plan, but in the interest of remaining present to care for Ben with his difficult treatments (and the terrible side effects that came with them), Mary chose to leave her job. With that, Ben and Mary moved into a tent, during a stormy Oregon November.

The first weekend I met them it was 34 degrees and rainy. Ben was only able to hold down the smallest bit of watered down oatmeal, as he had a treatment that day. I did what I could to help his nausea, and procured them an extra blanket. Mary was proud to tell me that despite living in a tent now, she was able to be there for Ben and care for him, and they were keeping warm with a propane heater *in their tent*. I can’t begin to relay how dangerous this is, but for Mary, the need to have warmth was paramount for Ben’s comfort. Mary beamed as she told me how she made sure when he had to vomit, it didn’t contaminate their belongings. She missed their apartment, but what mattered most was that she could remain by his side. Everything had been stripped from them, but they had each other.

Ben’s time on this earth is very limited. I have watched him slowly decline for months, and he likely won’t be here with us by the time summer arrives. Because of the side effects, and in my estimation, the burden on being houseless, Ben has quit his treatments. He is 42. Mary has stayed by his side through the process. She talks wearily in vague terms about the future; about returning to a minimum wage job if

there's one available, and hopefully getting back into some kind of housing situation. Neither of us articulate why that will be possible.

No one, regardless of age, income, gender or belief, should have to ever make such a terrible decision. As a FF/ Paramedic in our communities, I can't tell you how many times I have seen this play out in one form or another, and often, as with Ben and Mary, to a tragic conclusion.

We can't talk about fixing larger issues, like climate, education, even healthcare, if we can't provide for the very basic needs of caring for a loved one or ourselves. It's like Maslow's hierarchy, and this is the very ground floor; the bedrock on which everything else is built. FAMLI provides the umbrella of safety and sanctity that keeps families intact, that protects and nurtures those in need, and truly cares for our citizens at the most basic level. I urge you to please pass the FAMLI Equity Act, and make Oregon a leader in how we care for her children, people, and families. Thank you for reading.

Sincerely,

Dacia Grayber