

March 25, 2019

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Hila Ritter and I live in Portland, OR.

I love being a mom and I love my job. My spouse and I have a five year old and a 2 year old. My husband and I both work away from home full-time.

Deciding when to start a family was primarily a financial decision. When I was pregnant with my first child, I had an entry level clerical job for a local government agency with excellent health insurance, but I didn't have access to any paid family leave. Knowing that taking unpaid time off would be a great financial stress on my family, I tried my hardest to save all my sick and vacation days to be used after I gave birth. It was exhausting and stressful coming to work sick and being asked by my colleagues to leave because "that's what sick time is for." As an hourly employee, I did not have the luxury to flex my time, or use my lunch hour for doctor's appointments.

When my son was born, I took sixteen weeks off to care for and bond with him. Only five of those were paid, despite the sacrifices I had made throughout that year to save leave hours. With the majority of my time not paid, our family depleted our savings account, began using our credit cards to pay for groceries, and amounted debt. During that time I qualified for SNAP benefits. It's still astonishing and humbling to me that we both worked full time in above minimum wage jobs, live a modest lifestyle, had no additional medical debt thanks to excellent insurance, and yet still relied on public assistance for basic necessities such as groceries. We were able to prioritize being with our infant, but it was at the cost of our economic well being. We need a systemic overhaul of the programs in place to protect our most vulnerable population; infants. They cannot yet speak for themselves, and I feel compelled to advocate on their behalf. Babies need care and bonding time with their parents to develop into healthy happy kids, and ultimately into adults who will thrive.

Right now, the ability to adjust to parenthood, learn to breastfeed, and manage a newborn is a luxury only certain people can afford. Our outdated workforce policies reinforce the antiquated notion that women belong at home and not in the workforce. They also ultimately affirm professional life as being built for men, and discourage new fathers from taking the time they need to bond with their children.

With paid parental leave fathers are more likely to take an active role in

child rearing, and mothers have increased well-being, lower rates of depression and stress. Children are more likely to receive well-baby checkups and vaccinations in the first years of life and children with special health care needs and parents are supported to have improved physical and emotional health because parents are able to appropriately use their earned sick time for doctor's appointments (including prenatal care). As a society, we are all better off when kids have a strong start in life.

I believe this is a very important equity issue because there are large disparities in access to paid leave across groups of people, with access being particularly low among low wage workers, people of color, and those newer to the workforce. This policy increases racial equity, leveling the playing field for families of color.

The research is very clear, paid parental leave has positive impacts across the spectrum. It's time to invest in our children. Please support HB 3031

Sincerely,

Hila Ritter