

March 25, 2019

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Neon Brooks and I'm here tonight with Family Forward Oregon and I live in Northeast Portland. I'm the mother of a three-year-old and I'm expecting a second child in June. I've always believed that paid family leave was an important policy for improving equality in our society, but after I became a parent, the issue became much more urgent and personal to me.

I was working in a contract position when my daughter was born and ended up getting one week of paid leave before my contract ended and I became unemployed. This was a very stressful time for my family as I scrambled to find a new job and care for a newborn and my husband and I worried about how to cover our expenses.

I worked freelance for the next two years. This worked well for our family in a lot of ways, but meant I would get absolutely no paid leave if my husband and I decided to have another child. I wanted to have children close together in age, and every month I would feel the stress of my children growing further and further apart. It was more than a year after we were ready to start trying for a second before we were finally both employed by companies that provided some paid leave. It took us another year of trying before I got pregnant with the baby due in June.

After all that stress to wait until I had paid leave, my company is only offering me the equivalent of three weeks of paid leave (six weeks of disability leave at 50% pay). In the end, I'll still lose about nine weeks of income in order to stay home with my daughter for twelve weeks before going back to work.

Not having adequate paid leave has added stress and financial strain on my family. But when I think about my own story I mostly see how lucky we have been. I imagine what would have happened if we didn't have savings when my daughter was born, or if we had gotten pregnant by surprise when we weren't in a financial position to take time off.

When I hear that one in four women go back to work within two weeks of giving birth, I feel viscerally the impossible choices many families in our state have to make between financial stability and the health and wellbeing of their families. We need paid family and medical leave to protect families at a time when they are especially vulnerable so they don't have to make these impossible choices.

Sincerely,

Neon Brooks