

March 25, 2019

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I wish I had been able to be at the hearing in person to share why passing the FAMLI Equity Act is vitally important to Oregon, but unfortunately my schedule did not allow. Below please find my written testimony instead.

My name is Pamela Kislak and I live in NW Portland (House District 33). Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective on paid family and medical leave today. This issue is very personal to me. Three years ago, the day after Thanksgiving, I suffered a major seizure that landed in me in the hospital for a month, and necessitated surgery for a brain tumor. Clearly this was an unexpected but huge event for me and my whole family. We have two children who were ages 10 and 13 at the time and needed care in addition to the around-the-clock care I needed. My husband, with whom I own a medium-sized business, had the flexibility to take some time off to help advocate for my care – but we couldn't afford for him to not work at all for the length of time we needed full-time help. My mother in law had recently retired and was able to move in and care for me and take over caring for our family. Unfortunately, most Oregonians do not have this luxury. They must choose between their paycheck and caring for loved ones. What if my mother-in-law wasn't retired and healthy herself? Would my husband had had to quit his job? If he had had to shutter his firm, an additional 13 people would have lost their jobs. It would have devastated us and severely impacted our employees. I understand that paid family leave feels difficult for businesses, but as a business owner myself, now with over 25 employees employees, I know that when our employees know that they can care for their families, they are more dedicated to their jobs and more present every day. It is actually a win-win situation. Paid family leave insurance would help small business owners because they can't afford to offer paid family leave on their own.

Now we struggle when we do what we know is “right” – enabling our employees to care for their families – and in doing so potentially sacrifice what is prudent – ensuring the financial stability of our firm. We face this question on a consistent basis: A senior member of the firm whose husband suffers from cancer, a project leader who is welcoming his first child into their family, and an employee who is the sole support for an aging parent who needed a hip replacement. Paid family leave insurance would help us, and other smaller business owners to stand on the side of what is right. Small, consistent payments would provide the financial predictability we need as a business, while helping our employees cope with the unpredictability of life.

Lastly, legislation that supports businesses do what is right, may feel hard before the law is in place, but it is actually extremely helpful. We recently grew our business and now provide leave according to the OFLA. As we approached this size, compliance with the law felt as if it would be onerous. However, now that it is in place, we find that we can better plan by assuming that everyone will take the maximum allowable time off. We see that our firm is growing more equitably because both men and women are taking time covered by the law. And our leaders are learning that while it requires quite extensive juggling to cover the work of our employees who are out, all of our team is more committed to the firm knowing that they can take the time they need when they experience the joy of parenthood.

I urge you to support paid family and medical leave insurance. This is critical to families in Oregon.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Pamela Kislak