

AARP Supports HB 3031

Good morning, Chair Rep. Barker, committee members. My name is Elaine Friesen-Strang, and I am the Volunteer State President for AARP Oregon. On behalf of our over 510,000 members, AARP Oregon offers our support for HB 3031.

There are nearly 470,000 family caregivers in Oregon who are taking care of an adult relative, spouse or friend. About 60 percent of them are still in the workforce. Most are doing so without basic workplace protections. In fact, only 15 percent of U.S. workers have paid family and medical leave through their employers.

Nearly everyone needs paid family or medical leave at some point in their lives. Many end up facing economic hardship due to lost jobs, loss of health care coverage, and reduced Social Security benefits. I am one of those statistics.

At age 58 I left my job as a director of a non-profit program because I could no longer work full time and meet the caregiving needs of my 93 year old father. For years, my sister and I struggled to help our parents with their medical, residential, transportation, and emotional needs. Dr. Karen Hooker, from OSU, points out that the average middle aged couple has more parents than they do children.

When you realize your parents can no longer advocate for themselves, when they are dependent on others for their daily needs, something has to give. I was fortunate—my husband was still working. But the reality is that many workers, struggling to make ends meet from paycheck to paycheck, they simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

Lost wages and benefits average \$304,000 over the lifetimes of people age 50 and older who stopped working to care for a parent. And the older you are, the harder it is to re-enter the job market.

Without paid leave and flexible workplace policies to support family caregivers, vulnerable seniors will increasingly be forced into taxpayer supported long term care settings which would add even more pressure on Oregon's already strained budget.

An important provision in this bill allows for intermittent caregiving leave. Usually family and medical leave must be serious enough to require at least a week of leave or more. Caring for an aging parent or seriously ill family member often involves regular predictable

care schedules. This provision would cover an employee to take leave in increments of a day, if the reason for leave is predictable on a weekly basis and verifiable.

HB 3031 is a fair, common-sense solution: everyone contributes, everyone benefits.

It gives workers the economic peace of mind they need to provide the care that helps loved ones age with dignity at home rather than in more costly and mostly taxpayer-funded institutional settings such as nursing homes.

AARP Oregon urges you to support HB 3031.