

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Esther Friedman. I am a long-standing resident of Salem, Oregon with two children, one of whom has disabilities. I am writing to support HB 3031, the FAMLI Equity Act.

I am writing to you for many reasons. I am a single parent and I have spoken to many other single parents who share the struggle to balance work with meeting the needs of our children. In my case in particular, I am lucky to have some limited sick leave, yet I still struggle to manage my child's health issues and my own without suffering lost wages or even concerns about keeping my jobs. Having access to this leave can literally make a difference between a parent being employed and contributing to our economy or having more parents needing unemployment or welfare benefits as they cannot maintain their employment without adequate leave provisions. The FAMLI Equity Act is a major step in solving this problem.

The FAMLI Equity Act can be literally life-changing for families like mine. If I am seriously ill, or my child is, I lose wages and go into debt. I often forego healthcare or go to work sick in order to avoid this, and I have had to reschedule needed health care for my family in order to maintain my job. This sort of situation impacts not only the people who are struggling, it damages productivity and morale within the workplace. If there were universal paid leave, as is true in virtually every other country in the world, productivity would increase and jobs would literally be saved. Parents like me would also gain much needed peace of mind knowing it is now possible to both meet our children's needs and maintain a position in the work force, without undue economic suffering. I know there are many parents of children with disabilities who are unemployed or underemployed due to the lack of flexible leave policies. Additionally, the current laws do not recognize family situations like mine, with a disabled child who has chronic health issues; when I need leave to care for my child or attend medical appointments, I quickly deplete the minimal sick leave I have and suffer economic losses I cannot afford. Having a child with disabilities often comes with additional costs, and the impact of missed wages is crucial.

In addition to the many parents who are in my situation, trying to stay afloat economically and maintain job security while caring for high-needs children, there are many families who cannot adequately care for a newborn, a newly adopted child, or an aging parent or relative, without adequate sick leave. This has significant impacts for many families. The U.S. lags behind other countries to an alarming degree in this respect, and this has significant social and economic costs for our society in terms of lost wages, lost consumer spending, reduced productivity due to stress and distress among workers, and in the social and emotional costs to families, such as poorer health in babies who did not have time to establish breastfeeding, emotional costs to parents and children lacking time to bond after adoption, and aging parents who have to be placed in a facility or left without care. I urge you and implore you to support the FAMLI Equity Act. Thank you for your consideration.

Esther Friedman

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