



03.25.19

To: The House Business and Labor Committee and the Senate Workforce Committee  
From: Chris Baker, Community Engagement Coordinator, Hunger-Free Oregon  
Re: Support of HB 3031

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chris Baker, I live in Oregon City, and I am here in support of House Bill 3031, the FAMLI Equity Act, both on behalf of Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO), where I am the Community Engagement Coordinator, and as a single mother of two.

After my husband left us, my boys and I lived in poverty for 10 years while I transitioned from stay-at-home mom to student to employee. When I was hired at Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon in 2016, I was still receiving SNAP benefits and barely able to make ends meet. It was at PHFO that I was finally able to begin my journey out of poverty. For the first time in 10 years I began to feel like I was finally living life again, rather than just surviving it.

Last November, my oldest son - my best friend - who has always helped me find levity in even the darkest of moments, was diagnosed with clinical depression with suicidal thoughts and was labeled as high risk. I began using sick days at work so I could stay home with him because he didn't want to be alone, or because I couldn't get myself to leave him alone. When I did go to work I was physically and emotionally depleted because I would go days, weeks without sleeping at night because I was worried about what he might do while I was asleep. While I was at work, I worried about what I might come home to. The stress and exhaustion took a toll and in December I had a breakdown.

A coworker reached out to me and gently, lovingly, encouraged me to step back from work for a while. She also nudged the leadership team at PHFO to finalize the Paid Family Leave Policy they had been working on. I took half of December and all of January off from work to help my son settle into his new meds and to practice self-care for myself. While PHFO leadership worked hard to finalize our Paid Family Leave Policy, several of them donated their sick time to me so that I could take the time I needed to be home.



Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon now has a Paid Family Leave Policy in place. I am here today because while I am so grateful and honored to work for an organization that puts health and family first, I know that a majority of Oregonians do not work for organizations that offer Paid Family Leave. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't had the opportunity to take paid time off. I may have continued to work and my own health would have suffered. I may have taken the time off unpaid and slipped right back into poverty, unable to pay mortgage, utility bills, etc.

But the ability to take this time off shouldn't depend on the policies of every employer. Too many Oregonians already struggle every day to make ends meet. It is basic human decency to provide the space and time needed for folks to be with their loved ones during a difficult time. Passing HB3031 would allow Oregonians the opportunity to have the time they need to be with family, without the stress of wondering how they will pay their bills. I urge you to please pass HB3031 and put families first.

Respectfully,  
Chris Baker