

March 25, 2019

To: The Oregon House Business and Labor Committee and Senate Workforce Committee

From: Diane Spencer

Re: Support of HB 3031

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committees,

My name is Diane Spencer and I'm here tonight with the Oregon Education Association. I live in West Linn.

I have worked as a public school teacher since 1997 and in 2012 at age 42 I had a major ischemic stroke one week into the school year. I required immediate hospitalization and subsequently my health insurance permitted me to transfer to inpatient rehab where I could receive individualized daily therapy. I had to relearn to drink liquids, eat food, sit unassisted, improve my speech, complete personal care, and to walk.

I struggled to make sense of numbers and when I received my first, normal paycheck after my stroke I didn't think about it. That check was time worked plus the small amount of leave time I had accrued. The following month was different without any accrued leave however, and I was forced to try to understand what I was going to do, as the primary custodial parent of my sixth grader. I only had a few thousand dollars in savings, and I tried to go through it as slowly as possible.

I had no use of my left arm or hand and other ongoing disabilities and was still attending five to ten hours weekly of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and acupuncture. After being out of work for the first 90 days during my recovery, I lost my medical insurance. I was invited to sign up for COBRA with a monthly cost greater than my mortgage. I had been healthy previously and so was not well versed on the specifics of my insurance. It was devastating to receive the letter informing me that I was about to lose my healthcare, at the time when I needed it most.

I was terrified of losing my house and not being able to provide for my child, so I threw myself into therapy until going back to work .3 time, not quite four months after learning to walk again. I was fortunate enough that my 70 year old parents could drive me to work every day so I was able to keep my house and job.

Testing revealed that I have a very rare congenital blood disorder that caused the stroke, occurring approximately in one out of 35 million people. There was no way to predict that this would happen to me nor anything that could have been done to prevent it. However, if there were adequate financial support for people like me in a crisis, perhaps we could better weather the storm. I wonder what could have been possible for my recovery if I had been able to continue receiving therapies instead of having to choose working over my health. I am grateful to my employer and to my family. But my experience is a perfect example of why Oregon needs a robust paid family and medical leave insurance program. In the aftermath of a life-changing health incident like the stroke I had, Oregonians need the resources, stability, and support necessary to re-build. HB 3031 will help move us toward a reality where that is the case, so I urge you to support it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your consideration of HB 3031.

Sincerely,

Diane Spencer

4995 Bonnet Dr.

West Linn, OR 97068