

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Andrea and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at Oregon Health & Science University. I am writing in support of HB 3031, or the FAML I Equity Act.

HB 3031 is an essential and long overdue piece of legislature that will greatly improve the lives of many Oregonians. The bill will not only support families in raising their children and caring for their loved ones in times of hardship, but is likely to also save Oregon money in the long run.

As a Medical Social Worker at a Level I Trauma Center and Certified Stroke Center, I work with patients and families in times of unexpected tragedy and hardship. Many of these families come from across Oregon to receive specialized and emergency services provided only by OHSU, and even more are middle- and lower-class families living paycheck to paycheck.

While FMLA and OFLA protect the jobs of many of our visitors, these policies do not pay the bills. The families of our patients with new cancer diagnoses or devastating traumatic injuries must make the difficult choice between being with and caring for their loved ones, and paying the bills to keep their families afloat, pay their rent, and provide for their children. Many of these families sleep on our waiting room couches for days and weeks at a time, unable to afford a local hotel and choosing to put the needs of their spouse or child over their own basic needs. Paid family leave would allow these families to stay above water financially and, many times, avoid eviction and poverty, while still providing caregiving and supportive presence to their loved ones.

While the moral and empathic benefits are clear, a more concrete justification for paid family leave is the financial argument. A common shortcoming of political policy is the compelling pull of short-term gratification – in this case, the desire to avoid the immediate costs of paid family leave with an unintentional disregard for the long term repercussions. However, we would be trading this perceived cost saving measure for the more significant costs associated with sheltering and providing medical care and insurance for so many homeless families, and subsidizing the long term effects of intergenerational poverty. Today, many families and patients are truly driven to financial ruin by the missed paychecks and mounting costs of having a chronically ill family member or suffering an unexpected injury. We can see the impact of these struggles every day, in increased numbers of children living in family shelters and climbing rates of homelessness in Portland. With Paid Family Leave, we can finally *do it right the first time*, protecting families from homelessness and caring for our sick Oregonians like they are our own family members.

For your brothers and sisters in Oregon, please make the compassionate and fiscally responsible choice by supporting HB 3031. Their voices and lives matter, and this is an easy way for you to make a difference.

Thank you,

Andrea, LCSW
Medical Social Worker