



Ben Verhoeven,
President, Peoria Gardens, Inc.
Albany, Oregon
Testimony in Support of HB 3031, The FAMLI Equity Act
Monday, March 25, 2019

Chair Taylor, Chair Barker, committee members:

Hello there. I'm Ben Verhoeven. I'm a second generation farmer and nursery owner. I run a family owned greenhouse in Albany, Oregon. I am a constituent of Representative Boshart-Davis. I'm proud to say my 26 year-round and 40 seasonal employees receive great benefits which, in the big picture, don't cost me much, but mean a lot to everyone, and they're good for business. My workers are entitled to 12 weeks of full pay parental leave - maternity and paternity, not to mention health care, paid vacation, paid sick time and a pension.

Many industry groups claim that policies like ours will hurt business.

That's just not true.

Paid parental leave on average costs me less per year than truck repairs, and has a much greater effect on the lives of the people I work with, especially their families.

When industry groups say paid family leave will hurt business what they really mean is that it will hurt their personal profits. I know this because at the end of the day these costs come out of my pocket. I am not immune to such costs, but Oregon farmers have a proud tradition of contributing to our communities. Paid family leave is another way that we can take care of our employees, coworkers, friends, family and neighbors.

Opponents of paid family leave will tell you that only individual workers benefit from such programs, and therefore all the financial costs should fall on workers' shoulders. This also is not true. Workers are not the only beneficiaries. As a business owner and native Oregonian, I benefit when our state can attract and keep the best workers. At our nursery paid parental leave helps me retain key employees, and it has been a fantastic recruiting tool for new hires. I don't have to retrain, and I find and keep the best possible workers. Let's make the same true for Oregon.

As a business owner I also benefit from stronger, healthier, more resilient markets. Lessening the financial hardship of an illness, a birth, or a family crisis leaves more savings in people's pockets, savings that they can put towards homes and gardens.

Asking employers and employees to pay into something jointly is not a radical idea. Together we all pay taxes to support schools, to improve roads and keep our neighborhoods safe. We do it because we have a mutual interest in a prosperous and vibrant state.

As any farmer will tell you we are subject to the forces of mother nature. A crop failure affects our business in the same way a sudden illness affects a family. Those of us in agriculture should be especially empathetic to anyone dealing with a sudden family issue, which is why I applaud the authors of this bill for doing away with the employee threshold and expanding coverage to include all businesses and employees. Life events like birth, illness and ailing parents happen to all of us, regardless of the size of company we work for.

I would also add that as a farmer and a small business owner the proposed legislation is a good bargain. I cannot afford comprehensive paid family and medical leave on my own, which is why an insurance program is the best way forward, as it would allow me to also provide medical leave. It costs businesses like mine less than offering stand-alone plans, and I know that my workers are also contributing. The state program will manage the process, confirm a worker qualifies, and of course pay for the leave itself out of the fund. This is a real service, both for me and for my employees.

Oregon cannot afford to pass this opportunity up. It makes sound business sense. It makes sense for Oregon. It's the right thing to do. Please support House Bill 3031.