

March 25, 2019

To: The House Business and Labor Committee and the Senate Workforce Committee  
From: Kristin "Luna Lea" Sposito  
Re: Support of HB 3031

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kristin "Luna Lea" Sposito and I live in Portland, Oregon where I was born and raised. I love this state and am committed to making Oregon a place that supports all families with a progressive, family friendly laws like HB 3031 that will guarantee paid family and medical leave, bringing our state standards to match that of all other industrialized countries in the world, and six other states here in the US including Washington and California.

I was born an only child to a single-mother who lost her job when she went on maternity leave at 40 weeks. Job loss prompted her to prioritize finding work over healing from birth and bonding across the first few weeks of my life. She was able to secure employment and then had to prioritize working full time, asking friends to care for me so she could return to work at the start of my 5th \*week\* of life. Yes, that's right, 5-weeks old. To put this into perspective, a 5-week old baby can barely hold their head up on their own, has yet to figure out how to control facial expressions, and needs someone there with them all..the..time!! It's helpful if that someone is their primary caregiver. "Well, I just did what I had to do" my mom says. This is similar position many families take when balancing the decision between fostering bonding time with their new baby and paying the bills. My mom wishes she would have had the option to work part time and be at home with me the other part of the time.

Having access to paid family and medical leave to compensate my mom for time lost at work would have helped prioritize family needs over economic ones. This is an important point not to be glossed over. While some families will elect to take the entire leave allowed, other families will not. The vital key is allowing families in Oregon the *option* to choose for themselves how they navigate this time for bonding with baby, healing from the birth experience, and adjusting to new normal. New parents have a lot on their plate...including exhaustion and in many cases sleep deprivation. Expecting they go back to work immediately is out of balance with what this moment of their life truly asks of them which is, to be present and be the best version of themselves they can possibly express. New parents need time to adequately adjust to their new normal. For some families that will be a few weeks, and for others that will be much, much longer depending on how the birth went or what the needs of their child are. Unpaid leave functions today as a tool of privilege, protecting families who have access to economic resources rather than as an opportunity for all families

to decide how they wish to navigate the first days, weeks, and months of their new child's life. HB 3031 is a step in the right direction for all families in Oregon to decide what will equate to a happier, more vibrant and meaningful adjustment for their family during a time of great transition.

For the past six and a half years I have worked as a labor and birth doula supporting families across all socioeconomic strata and various racial backgrounds. These experiences have given me a unique opportunity to see up close and personal how strong the desire remains intact for families to take the time to heal from birth, and engage in meaningful time with their new baby. We are in a golden age of science linking developmental brain health to strong bonding and attachment in the first hours, days, weeks, months and years of a child's life. The boom in neuroscience today strongly suggest brain and emotional developmental are intimately tied to initial bonding across the first three years of life of any human being. The more we can foster meaningful and strong bonding and attachment across this time period, the stronger a child's capacity grows toward creativity, trust, immune function, and adaptability/resilience. This is why many industrialized countries offer family leave for as long 39 weeks (UK), 42 weeks (France), 57 weeks (Germany), and even as many as 60 weeks (Sweden). At zero weeks, we fall gravely behind. One of the threads to breaking the cycle of generational trauma, is to find the places where behavioral change can be most influenced. The very beginning of a child's life is one of those powerful openings, and not just for the child, but for the parents too because parents are also born in this process! Other industrialized countries have caught on to this, which is reflected in the amount of paid family and medical leave they offer every year to their citizens. When leave from work is not an option, or is a limited option, stress can be compounded in devastating ways including postpartum depression for both parents. I cannot tell you how many times I've seen the support partner depressed about having to go back to work the next day, week, or two weeks post birth because they are now the sole income earner. When parents can take the time they want to prioritize bonding, this also helps them grow their own capacity for love, care, and commitment to the health and wellbeing of their child.

My unique perspective has shown me how upper income families thrive with time off from work—physically, mentally, emotionally, even spiritually. When given the time to slow down, rest, heal, bond, and learn who this new human is, parents are able to foster an environment that sets a tone of security and trust for their child and her individual needs. I have also seen this managed in one way or another by a couple of low income families. The relationship they cultivate with their child is markedly different than that of those who could not find a way to stay home with their baby long term.

When a mother has to choose to stay in an unhealthy partnership because she recognizes the value in bonding but cannot financially live on her own yet, we as Oregonians are not giving her the opportunity to set a truly solid foundation from which to grow with her baby. When a father feels the stress and burden to return to work within a week of his child's birth, we are not honoring the sanctity of the bond between a child and both of her parents. When a parent has to prioritize working over taking her child to well child visits because there is not enough time available in her day, we as Oregonians are saying we also do not care about the well being of that child nor do we understand the very real constraints placed upon that parent. When a parent has to prioritize work over staying with her sick baby in the hospital, we as Oregonians are saying it is not our priority for this baby to receive the loving support she deserves from her primary caregivers. And when we make families choose between paying the bills and creating meaningful bonds in the first months across the life of their child, we as Oregonians are saying that choice is mostly one of privilege, and implicitly reinforce the structural framework that splits families up rather than weaving them together stronger.

The first months of a child's life is precious all the way around. These are invaluable moments in the development of the child that will never be returned to the family. To rob a family of such a time is to contribute to the bankrupting of their ability to foster the strongest expression of themselves as a parent. To give all Oregon families the opportunity to engage in this most precious time with care, love, and grace is a progressive and radical agenda for the long-term emotional health and wealth of all Oregonians, and places us on par with every other industrial country while also blazing a trail for the rest of the country to follow in suit. Let's do this!

Sincerely,

Kristin "Luna Lea" Sposito