

March 25, 2019

To: The House Business and Labor Committee and the Senate Workforce Committee
From: Leah Olson, Neil Olson, Marc Olson, Gina Olson
Re: Support of HB 3031

Chair Barker, Chair Taylor and Members of the Committee,

My name is Leah Olson from Senate District 19, I am here tonight with my family to testify on behalf of HB 3031. My dad, Marc Olson, is one of the hardest working people I know. His service in the Coast Guard, 30-year career in the paper industry, and the time and care he put into raising myself and my brothers, exemplifies what it means to be an Oregonian. After months of doctor appointments examining his troubles with speech, we received devastating news. On February 5th my dad was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. ALS is a neuromuscular degenerative disease that causes progressive muscular paralysis and death. The average life span is 2-5 years post diagnosis. ALS is the same disease Dr. Stephen Hawking had, but he was considered unusually long-lived. Currently, ALS has no cure, only treatments to slow the rate of progression. This horrific disease is expensive and time consuming, especially for those who experience a full progression. On top of that, my dad can no longer work. My family and I have provided the following individual statements to let members of the committee know how this disease and access to family medical leave has uniquely affected our lives.

- **Neil Olson (son)**, *"My name is Neil Olson, I recently graduated and am currently working as an engineer in the aerospace industry for a Southern California firm. When I heard about my Dad's diagnosis, I knew immediately that my parents needed my help. Given the severity of the disease, it was apparent that the family would be overworked with regards to financial matters, interaction with doctors, and the lifestyle changes that come with this situation. By taking 12 weeks of family leave from work, I have the freedom to support them to the best of my ability. The state of California offers six weeks of paid family leave. In my time at home I have helped the family to better understand the disease symptoms and possible treatment methods available. Having additional hands to take care of my family's non-medical matters has been incredibly impactful. Additionally, providing emotional support for my loved ones is important to me. The family leave option I received from my employer made my decision simple. I enjoy the work I'm doing, and it would have been a terrible decision to choose between my livelihood and my family's well-being. Given that I recently entered the workforce, quitting my job would have been very damaging to my financial independence. However, my employer was very understanding, and I made the temporary move back to Portland three days after I heard the news."*
- **Marc Olson (father)**, *"After my diagnosis, I am extremely grateful that my son has been able to be at home these last 5 weeks thanks to family leave, and that all of our kids have supported me in fighting this disease. There is no way my wife and I would be able to research or come to resolution on what to do in trying to extend my life without their help. I will be forever thankful for their support, and to the State of California for allowing family leave for my son."*
- **Gina Olson (mother)**: *"When Marc was first diagnosed with ALS, we felt isolated and hopeless. When Neil, our son, shared his plan to move home to help with research and*

treatment options a huge weight was lifted. I was allowed to compartmentalize and focus on my areas of strength including scheduling of medical appointments, communication with medical trial coordinators, medical insurance and disability claims paperwork, and preparing nutritional meals appropriate for Marc's condition. The amount of paperwork for the Social Security Administration and Veterans Affairs Disability programs is daunting. Because I was allowed to focus my attention, we were able to avoid bottlenecks in the system and expedite his claims. I became a strong advocate for Marc and was able to have him considered for what many believe to be the most promising stem cell trial available. Our team approach to ALS has given us peace of mind that we have a fighting chance against this shattering disease."

- **Leah Olson (daughter):** *"I am a full-time student Willamette University and have held several internships here in the Capitol. It has been difficult balancing the demands of family, work, and school. I commute to Portland every Tuesday, Thursday, and weekends, but that wasn't enough to provide the day-to-day support my family needed. I was relieved when Neil called to say he was going to take the family medical leave offered by the California Family Rights Act, effective as of January 2004. His swift decision lifted the burden off of myself and my other brother, so I can stay in school until I graduate early this December. Looking to the future, I hope to secure a long-term position of employment in Oregon, following my internships at the Higher Education Coordinating Commission and Chief Education Office. However, after this experience, I will absolutely take into account the availability of paid family medical leave when choosing my career path."*

In closing, Neil's ability to take time off work to give care without compromising his work has helped the long-term health of the entire family, and may have added precious time to our father's life. We urge your support for HB 3031.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, The Olson Family