

Dear Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Matt Laas, a resident of SW Portland. I come here this evening to share my story as it relates to Paid Family Medical Leave, in support of House Bill 3031. I have been a professional Firefighter/Paramedic for nearly 24 years. My wife is also a professional firefighter/paramedic. Like most Oregon families, we have been working hard to earn a living and raise kids. We are one serious, life-changing event away from real trouble.

That event struck my family last week. During my mandated annual medical exam, a mass was noted on the left the side of my neck. Soon, I had a preliminary diagnosis of throat cancer. More tests are scheduled for this week to determine the severity and extent of the cancer. The specifics regarding treatment will be determined soon, but it is assumed there will be surgery, likely radiation and a lengthy recovery. I will need help during this recovery phase. My wife and I have been pouring through our options. Through the application of the current FMLA Laws, she will have to deplete any and all of her own accrued time off. But, what if she gets sick or injured? After exhausting all options while caring for me, what happens to her? What happens to our family?

It's critically important that the members of this committee realize that our family is operating from a very privileged position. We have options, based on our hard-fought rights and benefits as union workers. What about those hundreds of thousands of Oregon working people who do not have those options. Many will have to choose between being a breadwinner or a caregiver. This is a false dichotomy. We should not be forcing families to choose between caring for their loved ones or face economic ruin. Paid Family Medical Leave would provide a very basic safety net for families in their most vulnerable moments.

Thank you,

Matt Laas