



March 22, 2019

Dear Chair & Members of the Committee,

My name is Nik Portela, I live in The Dalles and I'm in support of HB 3031. I support the FAMILI Equity Act because it acknowledges chosen family as family which is critical to me and so many in my community.

Calling them a chosen family almost feels like a misnomer. It wasn't so much a choice, as it was a necessity. When I moved to Oregon thirteen years ago I very quickly found my teenage self alone and struggling. Luckily, Portland soon gifted me with some of the most authentic, supportive, loving family I could've ever dreamed possible. Their faces may have changed throughout the years, but their place in my life has never faltered.

Over the last few years I've had two really intense, but incredibly affirming, gender related surgeries. For both, I was told that by my surgeons that during the recovery process someone needed to be with me at all times for at least a week, possibly more, depending on how well my body decided to heal. From there, it was likely that I'd be slightly more independent, but I would be unable to go back to work for at least six weeks, and both of my surgeons made it very clear - without a caretaker post-surgery, they would not operate on me. Period.

The months spent on a waitlist to schedule these surgeries allowed for me to make some really big asks around these recovery requirements. Without my family, my chosen family, there's no way any of that would've been possible. While I do live with my partner, she was out of the house at least 12 hours a day during the week, unable to take off from grad school or her internship, lest she not graduate. So my chosen family, someone who has been a sister to me for four years planned for months up to the day with my partner about how to best rearrange their schedules, their lives, to help me heal from surgery. This person who I saw as a sibling, took about a week off of work total to help me with activities of daily living and my partner spread herself thinner than any person should have to. Without those two, I would've been unable to feed myself, get to the bathroom safely, redress my wounds, remember to take my medication, or call my doctor when something was just not right. There is no way I could've done that alone, and I'm so grateful that I didn't have to. But I was lucky. Not everyone has the financial means or access to any time off from work to make this happen for themselves or the people in their life that they love and care for. Additional legal protections and supports are needed in order to ensure those taking on the role of a caretaker are able to do so temporarily without risking their livelihood.

This bill is an opportunity for Oregon to show its LGBTQ citizens that our lawmakers respect and honor our families. To limit the definition of family would disregard the needs of so many Oregonians who lack traditional familial support in times of medical distress. My chosen family is why I'm here today. Why I'm able to live the life I have dreamt of in the body I've always seen when I look in the mirror. They may not look like me, our DNA may not match, and it would be really weird to adopt me at this point in my life, but they are my family through and through. I ask that you keep my story in your mind while making this decision because it is not a unique one. It is one shared throughout my community and one that deserves a place in this law.

Respectfully,  
Nik Portela