



# FAMILY FORWARD OREGON

Smart policies for today's families.

TO: House Early Childhood Committee  
RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2474  
DA: March 15, 2021

Chair Power, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Zika, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2474 to modernize Oregon's unpaid leave system. Family Forward Oregon is committed to advancing policies that support mothers and caregivers and help them to achieve economic stability, for themselves and for the families who rely on them. While our state works diligently to implement the Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act passed in 2019, our families desperately need leave protections now that meet their needs during the global pandemic.

There is no denying that COVID-19 has hit every Oregonian hard. However, women, mothers, and people of color have experienced some of the most disproportionate health and job loss impacts from this pandemic. The total number of women who have left the labor force since the start of the pandemic reached over 2.3 million in January, leaving women's labor force participation rate at 57.0%. Before the pandemic, women's labor force participation rate had not been this low since 1988.<sup>1</sup> Predictably, women of color are feeling the economic fallout of COVID-19 more significantly than white women. More than 1 in 12 Black women ages 20 and over (8.5%), 10 nearly 1 in 11 Latinas (8.8%), 11 and more than 1 in 13 Asian women (7.9%) remained unemployed in January 2021.<sup>2</sup>

With women and mothers disproportionately serving as family caregivers, the lack of job-protected leave has inevitably resulted in women leaving the workforce. And because the Oregon Family and Medical Leave Act includes thresholds for numbers of hours worked in a week and number of employees at a company, thousands of Oregon workers have been excluded and unable to take unpaid time as we continue to battle COVID-19. HB 2474 addresses this by:

- Including school and child care closures as a reason for leave.
- Ensuring that seasonal workers -- those that go back to work for the same employer -- appropriately accrue their time to qualify for OFLA.
- Changing the definition of "employee" to anyone employed, removing the qualification for the number of hours worked in a week.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/January-Jobs-Day-FS.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/January-Jobs-Day-FS.pdf>



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- Expanding OFLA to cover any business that has at least one employee and covering workers who have been employed at the company for at least 30 days.
- Removing employer ability to reduce the amount of leave if a worker fails to give notice while also allowing employees to determine in what order they would like to use their various accrued leave banks.
- Modernizing the definition of family to better reflect the diverse array of families in Oregon and implementing gender neutral language around people who experience pregnancy.

With job losses at record numbers -- particularly for women, mothers and historically and currently marginalized Oregonians -- now is the time for Oregon to work to remedy and equitably address this. HB 2474 makes sure that caregivers and those reentering the workforce are not at an even greater economic disadvantage from COVID-19 simply because they are unable to take job-protected unpaid leave.

HB 2474 gets us closer to ensuring that all Oregonians can take unpaid job protected leave to take care of themselves and their families. It also updates our statute to be more reflective of Oregonians' lived experiences and families. On behalf of Family Forward Oregon, we urge your support for HB 2474.

Courtney Helstein  
Political Director, Family Forward Oregon