



Testimony in Support of House Bill 2474

March 15, 2021

House Committee on Early Childhood

Russell Lum

Chair Power, Vice Chairs Zika and Reynolds, and members of the committee, I thank you for looking at protected family leave and ways it may need an update, including owing to current widespread underemployment. My name is Russell Lum and I am a political organizer for Oregon Nurses Association. We represent 15,000 nurses — including RNs and advanced practice nurses — and allied health workers. Oregon Nurses Association and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon urge you to pass HB 2474 to modernize the Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA).

Many of the hardworking people the legislature set out to aid in passing OFLA — an effort ONA was proud to be a part of — are falling through the cracks, because the dramatic job losses under COVID overwhelmed an aspect of the law. OFLA provides deserving protection for workers who meet the thresholds for hours worked and who work for entities that have 25 or more employees. But the pandemic has caused historic job losses, and getting back into the workforce after loss of employment, with the complexity of a family's COVID needs/responsibilities, makes meeting the thresholds elusive.

Women and mothers are more drastically bearing this precarity and exclusion of law in lasting ways, as they are more commonly turning to family caregiving responsibilities with lost work hours. And overall, pandemic joblessness has impacted Oregonians of color and LGBTQ Oregonians overproportionately. The State of Oregon's family leave structure can provide support to people who need it, and since these are already our community's more vulnerable members, the legislature should see to it this session.

ONA is pleased to see HB 2474 do the following to address the problems our residents are experiencing with qualifying for and operating within OFLA:

- Including school and child care closures as a reason for leave
- Ensuring that seasonal workers — those who 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 number of hours worked in a week
- Expanding OFLA to cover any business that has at least one employee
- 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
- 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
- Implementing gender-neutral language around people who experience pregnancy

As you can see, 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. ONA and NPO look forward to improvements in the coming years baked into the law as it stands and hope you agree with Oregon's nurses that that law nonetheless needs further legislative action today.