



*Neutral testimony regarding HB 1515 (2024)*

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Sosa and Elmer, and members of the committee,

My name is Kate Suisman. I am an attorney at the Northwest Workers' Justice Project (NWJP). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. We represent workers in low-wage jobs when bad things happen to them at work: when they are not paid, or are discriminated against for being in a protected class or are retaliated against for speaking up. Finally, we engage in policy advocacy and try to bring the important perspectives of workers in low-wage jobs and immigrant workers to these policy discussions.

We appreciate your continuous work to make sure our new, complicated, important Paid Family Medical Leave Program works as well as possible for all workers. We are glad to see the thoughtfulness about how PFMLI interacts with other protected leaves. Yet we have some concerns as well.

NWJP hears from workers each week who have run out of protected leave, yet need to miss work for valid, medical-related reasons. Workers need more ways to take protected leave, not less. OFLA leave is an important link in the chain of protections that workers have when they are ill or facing personal or family medical emergencies. Many of our clients work for smaller employers that are not covered by FMLA. OFLA leave is flexible and can be used for single appointments, or a few hours of missed to care for a sick family member, for example. The process to use OFLA is very simple. We are concerned that if OFLA's uses are narrowed, workers will not have realistic ways to take off short, protected amounts of medical and sick time.

The original law seemed quite clear that a worker can take a combination of PFMLI and OFLA leave, and that the original permitted uses of OFLA would remain. This makes sense to allow workers the flexibility to take paid or unpaid leave, as well as to take full day or partial day increments of leave.

We think there is a lot of good in SB 1515 as well, so we do not oppose it in total, but we ask that you reconsider the ramifications of limiting the allowable reasons to take OFLA leave.

Thank you for your attention to this important bill.