



FAMILY FORWARD OREGON

Smart policies for today's families.

Testimony before the House Committee on Business & Labor and the Senate Workforce Committee in support of HB 2005 and SB 454

February 16, 2015

Chair Dembrow, Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee:

My name is Andrea Paluso and I am the Executive Director of Family Forward Oregon, the Chair of the Everybody Benefits Coalition, and the Co-Chair of the Fair Shot for All Coalition.

Right now our country is facing historic income and wealth inequality. Wages at the bottom of the scale have been stagnant or only grown modestly over the past 3 decades, while wages at the top have grown significantly – producing historically significant gaps between the very rich and the very poor in this country. We are seeing job growth since the recession concentrated in low-wage occupations, and much less growth in others. And without very careful intervention, this problem will only continue to get worse.

A system built on this kind of inequality is not sustainable. It is not healthy. It is not economically or socially responsible.

Our local business leaders know that the success of their business is tied, closely, to the economic circumstances of the people who patronize them. Unlike the bigger corporate actors in our economy, these local business owners are linked to their communities – to the people who live, work and raise families there. By creating a statewide paid sick time floor we are establishing a reasonable community standard whose time has come. One which says: it is not acceptable that 82% of workers earning \$65,000/year or more have paid sick time while only 29% of workers earning less than \$20,000/year do. One that acknowledges that those least able to afford unpaid time off also have the least access to health care services and the worst health outcomes. One that acknowledges that having the basic dignity that comes with being able to care for yourself when your sick and also maintain the income your family depends upon isn't a "benefit", it's a right that is long overdue.

If you want a preview of the arguments you'll hear tonight against this common-sense standard, we need only look back to our history.

For an example we can look to the Factory Investigating Committee of New York after the tragic Triangle Waist Company fire in 1911 in New York City. One hundred and forty-six workers – mostly teenage girls – perished after a fire broke out on the 8th and 9th floors of the building. Many were locked in, with no way to escape.

Among others, the recommended and enacted laws that resulted required that factories install automatic sprinklers, keep factory doors unlocked during work hours, install fire escapes, give employees access to toilets and clean drinking water, reduce the work load for women to no more than 54 hours a week and 9 hours a day, and ban children under 18 from work that could injure their health and well-being.

The Triangle Factory laws established health and safety standards to protect workers, and became standards across the country – as passage of a paid sick time law would do in Oregon today. Those laws – passed about 100 years ago – were met with similar opposition from certain members of the business community as paid sick time, and with many of the same arguments.

In 1913, a spokesperson from the Associated Industries of New York said: “These changes [in the fire code] would lead to the wiping out of industry in this state.”¹

In 1913 in a memorandum submitted by the Needle Trades Associations to the Factory Investigating Commission: *“Against the bill recommending occupancy limits depending on the number of exits provided and the [number of floors], while we are in favor of a restricted occupancy...we believe that the bill in the form proposed will work great disadvantage to our trades, requiring manufacturers almost to double their area capacity in order to employ the usual amount of people that their business demands. We respectfully submit that any such procedure would not only be of great injury to the trade, but to the state, by forcing a number of these establishments to remove their factories to other states.”*²

The arguments against needed labor and workplace standards have always been the same: costs will rise, benefits will be cut, businesses will flee the state, the government is over-reaching, it harms small business or new businesses, too much bureaucracy, and the list goes on and on. These arguments were made around workplace safety standards, child labor laws, the establishment of the minimum wage, the creation of laws that prevent employment discrimination – and during every major debate about working conditions that this country has ever seen. Despite this, the market continues to operate, businesses continue to flourish, and employers continue to adapt to new standards in remarkably efficient ways.

The bill before you today is not only about an employers’ bottom line, though it doesn’t discount the importance of it either. It is about multiple bottom lines, those of workers struggling to make ends meet and those of employers who are doing the right thing in an environment that discourages it. It is about the community’s bottom line when disease spreads or health care costs increase. It is about public health, and social justice, and equity.

A paid sick time law will help us to create the kind of Oregon where more of us can prosper, take care of our families, and keep our jobs. At its core, this law is about how we believe working families in our state should be treated.

¹ George Martin. Madam Secretary: Frances Perkins. Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston. 1976. Pae 108.

² National housing association. *National Housing Association: proceedings of the first National Housing Conference held in New York, June 3, 5, and 6, 1911.* Vol. 2. No. 3. Academy of Political Science, 1912.

I urge you to support this bill on behalf of the many organizations and people working together to create a statewide sick time standard, many of whom you will hear from directly as we consider this historic legislation.

Thank you.