



March 23, 2017

Chairman Lively and the members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports

My name is Heidi Cao, and I am a resident of SW Portland. I am testifying on behalf of the Oregon Center for Christian Voices (OCCV), in support of HB 3087 which creates a family and medical leave insurance fund in Oregon. OCCV advocates for those whose voices are not often heard, including low-income mothers and families. We believe that current family leave policies are inequitable and harmful to low-income families.

The United States is one of the few countries in the world that does not guarantee new parents any type of paid family leave, despite the many benefits that paid maternity and paternity leave have on the health and well-being of children and families. Research shows that offering women paid maternity leave results in reduced infant mortality rates, an increase in breastfeeding, and an improvement in the mental health of new mothers. Paternity leave has been correlated to lower stress within families, and improves father-child bonding. Having paid family leave in Oregon will also benefit businesses, because women who are offered paid maternity leave are more likely to return to the workplace, which reduces costs for businesses at the same time that it improves morale and productivity within these businesses.

However, I think that the strongest argument for implementing family and medical leave insurance in Oregon is that how we care for our children and families says who we are as a society. Currently family leave policies in Oregon are extremely inequitable. Low-income workers are the least likely to be offered any type of paid leave at their jobs, and the least likely to be able to afford to take unpaid time away from work. Therefore most low-income parents take little time off of work after the birth of a child, resulting in higher infant mortality rates, higher levels of postpartum depression, and higher stress levels in low-income families. This is unacceptable.

Scripture says:

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you"—when you already have it with you.

Proverbs 3:27-28

We have an opportunity to address an issue of great inequity. Now is the time to act.