

March 25, 2019

To: The House Business and Labor Committee and the Senate Workforce Committee
From: Anna Stiefvater
Re: Support of HB 3031

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 3031. My name is Anna Stiefvater, I live in Portland and I'm a native Oregonian. I'm a public health nurse dedicated to improving the health of mothers, infants and families.

As you may be aware, very few Oregon workers have access to paid family leave from work and many Oregon workers cannot afford to take unpaid leave. This almost certainly ensures that parents are making the tough choice to return to work when their infants are just days or weeks old. We know from neuroscience research that the early experiences of infants affect the development of brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. I believe that a comprehensive paid leave policy that allows families the time they need to care for their infants at a critical time of development is among the most important ways we can improve maternal and child health in Oregon.

Research indicates that when parents have more time at home with their children, their families are healthier. Infants are more likely to be taken for regular well-child care and immunizations and are more likely to be breastfed. Fathers are more likely to be involved in the direct care of their children. Healthy patterns of attachment and bonding are formed. Unfortunately, nationally and in Oregon, the families that are most likely to need paid leave in order to have more time with their children are the least likely to have access to it. This type of inequity piles up for vulnerable families and is among the root causes for the many health disparities faced by low-income families.

Healthy communities are created through the implementation of health conscious policies, such as family leave and medical insurance that is available to all families. As a public health nurse, I've spent my career working with at-risk mothers and children in Oregon. Unfortunately, if our state doesn't support healthy early experiences and attachment for infants through policies such as paid family leave, many of the families I've worked to support will not have a fair chance at good health. I urge you to help empower working Oregonians and their families to be healthier by supporting HB 3031.

Sincerely,

Anna Stiefvater, RN, MPH