

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erin Barnhart and I am a lifelong Oregonian, born in Salem, raised in Roseburg, now living in Eugene. I'm writing today to express my wholehearted support for HB 3031, the FMLI Equity Act.

I support HB 3031 because healthy communities and healthy economies rely on healthy individuals. This means that we must be able to care for one another - our children, our parents, our friends and loved ones - without losing our jobs, losing critically needed income, and losing opportunities for career advancement and satisfaction. Providing comprehensive paid family and medical leave ensures that members of our community don't have to choose between earning an income and providing care to people in need, from newborn infants to elderly family members and friends.

When my father became critically ill and, within six weeks, passed away in late 2017, I had to step away from my work to provide secondary care. As a self-employed individual, this meant that I was turning down much needed income and quickly losing economic stability in order to provide care for my dad. I felt the ramifications of this economically and emotionally for months. HB 3031 offers options for self-employed individuals to opt and pay into the plan, providing protection for the thousands of self-employed individuals in Oregon who also want to care for their friends and family while remaining economically stable.

In addition, as an ally to the LGBTQIA+ communities, as well as a non-parent, I am proud of the provisions HB 3031 makes for allowing people to self-identify and determine their own families. When I am older and in need of care, I will likely need to rely on my nephew and niece, as well as my friends and chosen family, for assistance; HB 3031 would allow these folks to tap into much-needed paid leave in order to provide me and others like me with care later in life.

Losing my father was a traumatic experience, full of grief and uncertainty. Losing my income and struggling economically compounded the experience. I do not wish this for others, either today nor down the road as they potentially care for me and my older loved ones. HB 3031 creates a critically needed economic safety net so that Oregonians can care for their families - both blood and chosen - in ways that are ethically caring and economically sound, leading to healthier communities and more sound economics.

The U.S. remains one of the only countries in the world that does not provide paid family and medical leave for workers. I know we can do better. Let's start in Oregon by protecting the millions of folks statewide who provide and/or need care by passing comprehensive paid family & medical leave. Thank you for your support of HB 3031,

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