

March 25, 2019

To: The House Business and Labor Committee and the Senate Workforce Committee  
Re: Support of the FAMLI Equity Act (HB 3031)

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rev. Dr. Deborah Patterson, and I live in Salem. Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony today.

Just over twenty years ago, two special children entered our lives through adoption – our daughter, and her younger brother, her son. Because of the personnel policy that only allowed mothers giving birth to children to qualify for maternity leave, I was forced to use all my vacation time and return to work in short order. Ironically, I was working as Vice President for Program of a children's health philanthropy at the time. Needless to say, as staff and board there continued to explore the needs of families, this was a policy that was changed for those who came after me. We implemented Family Medical Leave as an employee benefit there for anyone needing to take the time to care for a new child or an ailing family member, as well as for their own healthcare needs.

But we were lucky. I was working with colleagues and a board who was willing and able to make those changes at an organizational level, shouldering the entire cost. Many, if not most employers are not able to do so. Fairness demands that this benefit come through a shared-cost insurance program, spread across all employees and employers in the state, to keep the costs down for everyone, while the benefit is made available to all workers.

Fast forward 15 years to when my Dad was dying. Again, I needed time to care for family medical needs. I needed to help my 83-year old mother care for Dad as he became increasingly weakened by the mesothelioma he had acquired through workplace exposure to asbestos. At the time, I was working for a small non-profit that in no way could afford to grant me family medical leave, so I was forced to make a tough choice and just quit my job to be with him, a choice made only possible by the fact that my husband was a full-time tenured professor at Willamette, but still it was a choice with serious impacts on our finances and my professional life.

Last year, more than 43,000 babies were born in Oregon. More than 36,000 died here. None of those babies came into this world alone and most of those who died needed the help of others, as well. Many other Oregonians experienced a significant health event – breast cancer, or a family member suffering a stroke – and needed time off for treatment, or to assist with recovery.

As a faith leader for over 25 years, I have personally experienced not only my own family's situation, but the diverse situations of myriad families who have welcomed newborns, cared for the sick, and tended their dying. I know these families are to be found in every city, rural community, and farm across this great State. It is not only my mandate as a clergyperson to care about these people, it is your mandate as elected leaders to care about them as well.

Our economy – with a minimum wage that has not kept pace with inflation and with the rapidly rising housing costs here – our economy demands that most of adults who are not yet of retirement age must work outside the home. They cannot afford to lose their wages or leave their jobs.

For the sake of the well-being of our families and our corporate future, I urge you to pass HB 3031, the FAMILI Equity Act.

Sincerely,  
Rev. Dr. Deborah L. Patterson  
Clergy, Smyrna UCC, Canby, OR