

To: Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the Committee  
From: Susan Parham, Executive Director, Women's Center for Leadership  
Date: 3/11/21  
Re: HB3110

My name is Susan Parham, and I am a proud native Oregonian and mother of four children, including two girls whom I hope will be leaders in their community. My middle career was spent climbing the ladder to senior management and VP positions in fortune 1000 & 500, consumer goods companies. My later career consulting for the same, and now my final career as Executive Director for Women's Center for Leadership, an Oregon registered 501 c3. Our mission is to fill-the-pipeline with talented women leaders to create an inclusive community committed to equity. We do this by advancing leadership skills with accessible, thought-provoking educational programming.

It is fitting for us to be considering HB 3110 this month - National Women's History Month. It was only in 1971 that the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed the practice of private employers refusing to hire women with pre-school children. They ended the discrimination against hiring pregnant women in 1978!

#### **They needed a push to get there.**

Not long ago in the United States, society thought of women as "unfit" to be medical doctors. By 1990, just over [20%](#)<sup>1</sup> of physicians were women. The [Washington Post](#)<sup>2</sup> reported in 2019, that, "for the first time, women make up the **majority of students in U.S. medical schools.**" Nearly half of all women today say they prefer being treated by a female doctor.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The medical industry needed a push to serve its customers.**

[Forbes](#)<sup>3</sup> says women account for 70-80% of the buying power and are the sole source of income in 40% of U.S. households.<sup>2</sup> An article entitled [Women's Leadership to Advance Economic and Social Change](#)<sup>4</sup> states that "girls and women reinvest 90% of their earned income into their families, which leads to more successful outcomes for their children and communities."

The number of women-owned businesses has increased by 31 times since 1972. Across the globe, women own [37%](#)<sup>3</sup> of all businesses. In a 2020, [The State of Women Entrepreneurs](#)<sup>5</sup> reported that "The intention to start a business within the next three years is approaching parity between male and female-owned businesses."

#### **Women are pulling to serve their customers.**

- Women can lead and own companies and households, and yet can only manage 23% of board seats.
- 59% of graduate degrees are earned by women – only 6% make it to CEO.
- 47% of employees entering the pipeline are women, but they represent only 21% of the C Suite.

We can pat ourselves on the back for 23% representation of women on boards. But “sixty percent of the women in board positions in the U.S. took the job when new seats were created by expanding boards, not by replacing male directors.”<sup>3</sup> The data shows that one seat isn’t enough: to reach critical mass and have a true voice, at least three board seats need to be filled by the under-represented group.<sup>3</sup>

**When women serve – we will all win.**

[AAUW](#)<sup>6</sup> “reported Companies with the most women on their boards outperform those with the least by 26 percent, based on measures that show return on invested capital.”

Women in general and specifically board members bring strengths that produce significant company growth: deep knowledge of target customers, ability to collaborate, surface tough issues, and balance risk and reward leading to increased productivity.

Let me share a personal example. As the only female VP in an Oregon consumer products company board room filled with ten others, the discussion turned to “beating” the competition. Testosterone surged, there was talk of advertising campaigns that would take the target company down, strike a blow, belittle, destruct and diminish them. Expletives were shouted, four letter verbs were suggested for the campaign. I was stunned – we were a family business! After deep breath, I bravely spoke up saying that the women with 80% of the purchasing power might not respond well to that type of campaign.

Women are good for the workforce. When Oregon requires public companies to seat women on their board, it will send a powerful message that we believe in equity and we need to build the pipeline at every stage to serve the development of our leaders.

**Women need a push – or is it society that needs a push.**

## References-

1. Bouvier, L. & Jenks, R. 1998. A Demographic Profile of Doctors and Nurses. *Center for Immigration Studies*.
2. Searing, L. 2019. The Big Number: Women now outnumber men in medical schools. *Washington Post*. Dec.
3. Davis, K. 2019 Twenty Facts and Figures to Know When Marketing to Women. *Forbes*.
4. Sullivan, K & Verveer, M. 2016. Women's Leadership to Advance Economic and Social Change. *Huffington Post*.
5. Lesonsky, R. 2020. The State of Women Entrepreneurs. *Score.org*.
6. The Case for Legislation Mandating Gender Diversity on the Boards of Oregon's Publicly Held Companies. AAUW. 2020