



February 4, 2021

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 588
Paid Sick Time for Construction Workers
Courtney Helstein, Political Director for Family Forward Oregon

Chair Riley, Vice Chair Hansell, and Members of the Committee,

Family Forward Oregon is in strong support of Senate Bill 588. When this legislature passed a paid sick time law 6 years ago, it took a major step toward ensuring that nobody in our state would be fired for the flu, that no kids would be stuck at school sick with no one to care for them because their parents lacked protected sick time, and that people could stay home to recover rather than spread illness to others at their workplace. However, a considerable portion of Oregon's construction industry still lacks access to this important benefit because of language in the original bill. Workers in Oregon who are covered by CBAs, *and* employed through hiring halls, *and* who receive benefits through multi-employer plans are currently exempted from this basic right to sick time. The lack of access to paid sick time for this essential workforce is unsafe and unjust.

Basic access to paid sick leave can have a tangible impact on the health of a worker, their family, and the overall health of our community. Workers without sick leave are more likely to delay medical care when they are ill¹, often leading to more serious and costly conditions over time. And alarmingly, a construction worker without paid sick leave is 21% more likely to experience a non-fatal jobsite injury than one with paid sick time². Parents without paid sick leave have been found to be twice as likely to send a sick child to school. In contrast, when parents are able to care for their children at home, sick children get better sooner and prevent the potential spread of illness to their classmates³.

The lack of access to paid sick time for this segment of our essential workforce has become a more intensified safety and public health concern amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when Oregonians are being encouraged to stay home while sick to prevent the spread of COVID-19, those without paid sick time often lack the choice to do so without putting themselves and their families in financial jeopardy. Importantly, research has shown that access to paid sick leave has helped to stem the spread of COVID-19. One study found that states where workers gained access to paid sick leave because of the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act were able to prevent 400 confirmed cases per state per day.⁴

Paid sick leave isn't just good for working Oregonians and the health of our community, it's good for businesses as well. When sick workers are able to stay home and take care of

¹ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0965>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3482022/>

³ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/coronavirus-puts-a-spotlight-on-paid-leave-policies/>

⁴ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00863>

themselves they recover more quickly and lessen the spread of illnesses, making their workplace healthier. Additionally, employers in jurisdictions where employees have access to paid sick time have seen growth to their businesses and no negative impact on profitability⁵.

Thirteen states and Washington D.C. have now enacted laws requiring paid sick leave that either explicitly cover unionized construction or, in some instances, allow for certain collective bargaining agreement (CBA) exceptions and may otherwise require CBAs to still meet minimum sick leave standards. Today, just 58% of the U.S. construction industry has access to some form of paid sick leave, one of the lowest rates for any sector. SB 588 creates an opportunity to help protect the workers in this industry.

Additionally, women still hold a disproportionate amount of family caregiving responsibilities compared to men. This means women are more likely to both need sick time for themselves but also to care for sick children and other sick family members. As this sector works to attract and retain more women in building and construction trades jobs, it is essential that they are able to access this critical protection; one that often makes the difference in keeping a job while also caring for a family.

Having access to paid sick time is a critical equity issue. This bill closes gaps in previous legislation, ensuring more of us can prosper, take care of our families, and keep our jobs. It ensures that the protections that we supported for so many other Oregonians when we created this historic protection for the majority of the workforce in 2015 are afforded to even more of us. Excluding construction workers from this basic right is unfair and out of line with the values we followed when passing this essential protection six years ago. It is time to remedy this inequity for this segment of our workforce.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge your "aye" vote on Senate Bill 588.

⁵<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-good-for-business-and-workers.pdf>