



Testimony in Support of SB 588

Emily K.P. Irwin
February 4, 2021

Chair Riley and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 588. My name is Emily and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Carpenters Local Union 1503. I have been a member of my union for over two years and it has been a career opportunity that changed my life. With all the ups that come with being a part of a union and working under a collective bargaining agreement, being exempt from paid sick leave has been a burden we have carried for far too long.

I am writing to offer support for SB 588 because it represents a common-sense solution for helping to ensure that workers are no longer excluded from being able to access to basic earned sick leave standards and employment protections that currently apply to most all sectors today. We know that when workers do not have paid time off, they are 1.5 times more likely to go to work even when they have a contagious illness. That is why we cannot wait any longer to close the loophole in the current Paid Sick Leave law to ensure that union members hired through hiring halls are able to stay home when they are sick or care for their loved ones when needed.

Additional benefits and facts for paid sick leave include:

- Access to basic earned sick leave has been shown to reduce employee turnover and related hiring/recruitment costs for employers.
- Lowers health care costs, as workers without paid sick leave are three times more likely to defer medical care for themselves and two times more likely to forego care for their families.

- Reduces preventable and costly Emergency Room visits.
- Aligns a consistent standard for all employers to follow, leveling the playing field for employers who currently have similar policies in place or that currently meet minimum standards under the law.
- Helps better ensure that more workers do not have to face impossible choices between going to work sick or risking infection or foregoing their income to stay home when needed
- Access to earned sick leave has correlated to reduced spread of COVID-19 and helping to flatten the curve.
- Thirteen states and Washington D.C. have now enacted laws requiring paid sick leave, yet Oregon is the only one with an explicit blanket carve out specified in these terms.
- Everyone gets sick, regardless of sector and this exemption encompasses a considerable portion of Oregon's construction industry, which has been deemed an essential workforce and remained open through the duration of the public health crisis.
- SB 588 does not create a wholly new program or system. It extends the same minimum protections and ability to accrue earned sick leave to workers currently excluded from coverage.
- Removing this exemption will help reduce existing barriers for many workers who are also primary family caregivers to both pursue and remain in careers within the construction industry.
- In 2019, women made up nearly half the U.S. total workforce and an increasing share of our construction sector, while still often taking on a disproportionate share of family caregiving responsibilities. This lack of a basic sick leave standard can lead to false choices for workers who also care for their families, having to decide between their income and the health needs of loved ones.
- Oregon's sick leave law has been in effect since 2016 and has not been shown to have had an adverse effect on employment or economic activity. Other areas that enacted earned sick leave laws prior to our state have reported negligible/minimal effect on overall business costs.

This crisis has further revealed the gaps in our system that can too often leave working families vulnerable and having to face impossible decisions. Amid a global pandemic and through our state's recovery process, it is critical that basic protections be in place for all workers that equitably support health, safety, and economic livelihood.

The recovery plan must center the safety of working families and the communities they serve and live in and removing this unsafe carve out is one such critical step towards advancing that vital goal, so that workers are not left further behind in any areas of our economy.

I, my union brothers and sisters, and our families, urge your support for SB 588.

Sincerely,

Emily K.P. Irwin

United Brotherhood of Carpenters

Local 1503