



Service Employees International Union Local 503

72,000 public services workers, care providers, and non-profit employees in Oregon.

TO: House Early Childhood Committee
FR: SEIU 503, OPEU
RE: HB 2474 OFLA Modernization Support

March 22, 2021

Chair Power, members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2474 to modernize Oregon's unpaid leave system. SEIU is an 85,000 member union in Oregon and SW Washington and a 2 million member union nationally. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families. In Oregon we represent many of the workers who have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, including care workers, hospital workers, public workers, airport workers, and more.

By now it is clear that COVID-19 has affected every working Oregonian hard. However, women, people of color and LGBTQ Oregonians have experienced some of the worst health and job loss impacts from this pandemic.

- *The total number of women who have left the labor force since the start of the pandemic reached over 2.3 million in January, leaving women's labor force participation rate at 57.0%. Before the pandemic, women's labor force participation rate had not been this low since 1988.¹*
- *More than 1 in 12 Black women ages 20 and over (8.5%), nearly 1 in 11 Latinas (8.8%), and more than 1 in 13 Asian women (7.9%) remained unemployed in January 2021.²*
- *Nearly two-thirds of LGBTQ households have experienced employment loss since the pandemic. This is particularly troubling given that LGBTQ people report higher rates of employment discrimination generally and may struggle to find new jobs.³*

With women and mothers disproportionately serving as family caregivers, the lack of job-protected leave has inevitably resulted in women leaving the workforce.⁴ And because the Oregon Family and Medical Leave Act includes thresholds for numbers of hours worked in a week and number of employees at a company, thousands of Oregon workers have been excluded and unable to take unpaid time as we continue to battle COVID-19. HB 2474 addresses this by:

- Including school and child care closures as a reason for leave.
- Ensuring that seasonal workers -- those who go back to work for the same employer -- appropriately accrue their time to qualify for OFLA.

¹ <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/January-Jobs-Day-FS.pdf>

² *Ibid.*

³ <https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/2020-covid-lgbtq-households-report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/04/23/483846/frontlines-work-home/>

- Changing the definition of “employee” to anyone employed, removing the qualification for the number of hours worked in a week.
- Expanding OFLA to cover any business that has at least 1 employee.
- Covering workers who have been employed at the company for at least 30 days.
- Removing employer ability to reduce the amount of leave if a worker fails to give notice.
- Allowing employees to determine in what order they would like to use their various accrued leave banks.
- Modernizing the definition of family to better reflect the diverse array of families in Oregon.
- Implementing gender neutral language around people who experience pregnancy.

With job losses at record numbers -- particularly for women, mothers and historically and currently marginalized Oregonians -- now is the time for Oregon to work to remedy and equitably address this. HB 2474 makes sure that caregivers and those reentering the workforce are not at an even greater economic disadvantage from COVID-19 simply because they are unable to take job-protected unpaid leave.

HB 2474 gets us closer to ensuring that all Oregonians can take unpaid job protected leave to take care of themselves and their families. It also updates our statute to be more reflective of Oregonians’ lived experiences and families. On behalf of SEIU 503, OPEU, we ask you to vote Yes on HB 2474.

Sincerely,

Mike Powers
President
SEIU Local 503, OPEU