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To: Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and members of the Senate Business and Labor Committee
From: Martha Sonato, Legislative Advocate, Oregon Law Center
Re: Senate Bill 1515-3: Relating to leave laws concerning time off from work
Date: February 8, 2024

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on SB 1515-3. At the Oregon Law Center, we have been closely monitoring the implementation of Paid Leave Oregon and its effects on low-income communities across our state.

Paid Leave is a crucial program that can bring about significant positive change in the lives of individuals and families, particularly those in low-income brackets. Access to paid leave ensures financial stability during times of illness, caregiving responsibilities, or other personal circumstances, ultimately contributing to healthier communities.

In this testimony, I aim to highlight several concerns OLC has identified, acknowledging that there may be additional ones not yet addressed. I look forward to continuing discussions post-session to address these collectively.

Seasonal workers and Paid Leave Oregon

We are concerned by the potential barriers faced by seasonal workers in accessing Paid Leave benefits. Many of our clients, particularly those in industries such as agriculture, construction, and landscaping, rely on seasonal employment that may not offer traditional benefits or job security beyond the duration of a specific project or season.

The eligibility criteria for Paid Leave may inadvertently exclude these workers because their employment status changes throughout the year. This uncertainty jeopardizes their ability to access crucial leave benefits when they need them most.

We are encouraged by the provision requiring OED to report on paid leave access for seasonal workers, and we urge the committee to closely monitor these findings. It is essential that any barriers to access are identified and addressed promptly to ensure that all workers, including those in seasonal industries, can benefit from Paid Leave Oregon, especially since these are some of the workers who can benefit greatly from this program.

Paid Leave Program Accessibility

Given ongoing program changes since 2019, including recent amendments in 2023 and proposed provisions in SB 1515-3, effective multilingual education and outreach are crucial



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for ensuring broad awareness and access to Paid Leave Oregon. While the program is relatively new, we are concerned that many low-income Oregonians may be unaware of the program or hesitant to apply due to concerns like fear of public charge and/or fear of retaliation by their employer for taking leave. We urge ongoing commitment and dedication from the agency and legislators to improve efforts in ensuring statewide awareness, access to paid leave, unpaid protected leave, and understanding of worker rights and protections under the various leave programs.

We look forward to engaging in conversations in the interim to ensure such an impactful program reaches those that most need it. This is a vital program that promotes economic stability for low-income individuals and families. We appreciate the committee's time and attention to this important program, and we urge you to consider the concerns outlined above as you continue to refine and expand Paid Leave Oregon.

Thank you,

Martha Sonato

The Oregon Law Center's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services.