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February 12, 2024

Chair Paul Holvey  
House Committee on Business and Labor  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Holvey and Members of the House Committee on Business and Labor:

My name is Nicole Barnard-Croft, Senior Director of Human Resources, and I'm testifying on behalf of Life Flight Network. Life Flight Network is a not-for-profit patient transport service providing helicopter, fixed-wing, and ground ambulance transport throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Our mission is to save lives with industry-leading care and transport. I'm here to testify in support of HB 4050 because, in order to accomplish that mission, employers like us need the legislature to allow us to be competitive in an extremely tight labor market.

Under the current provisions of the Oregon Equal Pay Act, we are at an insurmountable disadvantage over our competitors not operating in Oregon. In order to attract and retain top talent to Oregon, to carry out our life-saving mission, we must be allowed the discretion to incentivize talent when business necessity dictates. Not having staff available to operate our flight and ground ambulance is a business necessity and a public health concern.

Retention and sign-on bonuses are common tools used by employers to incentivize top talent in competitive job markets with high demand skills. Life Flight Network employs some of the most in-demand professions in the country: nurses, paramedics, and pilots. We must be allowed to incentivize top talent to join our organization.

By banning these types of compensation incentives, we have been forced to rely solely on base salaries, which are also regulated by the Oregon Equal Pay Act and leave no room for negotiation. Base salary alone in some cases is not sufficient to attract and retain highly skilled employees. Despite our internal initiatives to enhance total compensation packages with exceptionally generous benefits, we find ourselves unable to compete. A recent example of this underscores the challenge we are facing. Just this week, a Rotor Wing Pilot resigned from our team, opting to relocate their family to Texas as opposed to staying in Oregon due to our inability to match the sign-on incentives offered to them in another state. The loss of that pilot decreases our capacity to provide life-saving air ambulance support to Oregonians in need.

To recruit and train the level of talent of that departing pilot will take anywhere from 6-8 months. During those 6-8 months, other staff will be forced to work overtime, which can lead to burn out, and exacerbate the situation, or we may be forced to have limited or delayed services in some areas due to staffing levels.

While I understand the positive intent of the Oregon Equal Pay Act, in practice, it has had an unintended negative consequence on Life Flight Network's current, and prospective employees and the Oregonians who are in desperate need of our life-saving services.

Thank you,

Nicole Barnard-Croft, PHR, SRHM-CP  
Life Flight Network  
Senior Director of Human Resources