

HB 2575 : Paid Family Leave

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House Committee on Human Services and Women's Wellness
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Madame Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the importance paid family leave. My name is Cathy Kaufmann and I am the Policy Director for Children First for Oregon. Children First is a widely respected nonprofit, nonpartisan child advocacy organization that has been speaking up on behalf of Oregon's children for 15 years. We believe every child in this state has a right to health, safety and security.

Children First supports HB 2575 because creating a paid family leave program in Oregon is the right thing to do for Oregon families. The ability of parents to stay home and care for new or ill children is essential to family well-being.

Study after study shows that the first few weeks of life are especially important for children's healthy development. Newborn or newly adopted children need time with their parents. Given the importance of this time to child development, some basic level of this time should be available to all families -- not a luxury available only to a few.

Family life has changed significantly in the last few decades. Not only are there more single-parent families, but the majority of two-parent families rely upon two incomes, meaning fewer families have the comfort of a stay-at-home parent. As a result, most Oregon parents juggle work and family responsibilities. The serious concern is that, too often, the need to pay the rent forces too many parents to choose work over the critical needs of their children.

Unpaid family leave provides workers with job protection, but unfortunately most workers are unable to afford the time off. More than three in four (78%) FMLA eligible employees who needed but did not take FMLA leave report that they simply could not afford to take unpaid leave. Half of all workers have no paid sick time. For low-income workers, who are least able to afford time off without pay, the situation is worse; almost three in four have no sick leave

Research shows that paid leave policies are good for kids. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, the education and health of children improves when their parents are able to take paid leave. And a government study conducted in Canada found that extended time off for parents with newborns is associated with the successful social and cognitive development of children. Job protected paid leave has been shown to significantly decrease infant mortality, while unpaid and non job-protected leave has no significant effect. Furthermore, new mothers who are unable to take leave to care for their newborns are less likely to breastfeed their babies, the health benefits of which are well documented.

HB 2575 is modeled on California's highly successful paid family leave program, a program utilized most by new parents. A recent study of that program by California's Senate Office of Research found that more than 80 percent of benefits went to mothers caring for newborns.

Funding family leave through an employee payroll deduction provides Oregon workers and their children with a much-needed benefit, without unduly burdening employers. In fact, a study of California's paid leave program showed that businesses profited from lower turnover and training costs, reduced absenteeism, as well as higher productivity, loyalty, and morale.

Hard-working families ought to be provided with the supports they need to remain productive members of the workforce and children ought to have a right to time with their parents when they need it most. Providing Oregon children and their families with support for these needs will result in more secure families, healthier children and stronger workplaces. I urge you to support HB 2575. Thank you for your time and consideration.