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Oregon House Passes Landmark Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program

Proposal ensures Oregonians can afford to care for a new baby, sick loved one

SALEM – A landmark paid family and medical leave insurance program passed the Oregon House of Representatives today.

The proposal, House Bill 2005, provides every Oregon worker 12 weeks of paid leave to welcome a new child, to recover from a serious illness, to care for a loved one recovering from a serious illness or to deal with issues related to domestic violence, harassment, sexual assault or stalking.

“At some of the most difficult, stressful times of their lives, when the people they love need them the most, hundreds of thousands of Oregonians are forced to choose between their jobs and their loved ones,” said House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson (D-Portland), a chief sponsor of the legislation. “Every Oregon family deserves better. We have the power to change that with this critical piece of legislation.”

Modeled after Oregon’s unemployment insurance program, paid family and medical leave insurance will be available to all Oregonians who made at least \$1,000 in a calendar year. The program will be supported with a payroll assessment, not to exceed one percent, split between employers and employees. Employers with more than 25 employees will contribute 40 percent of the overall contribution. Small employers with fewer than 25 employees will not have to contribute, though employees will still be able to utilize the program. Small businesses choosing to pay into the program will be eligible for grant programs to help cover the cost of replacement workers.

A tiered benefit is offered through the program, with 100 percent wage replacement available for low-income Oregonians who make less than 65 percent of Oregon’s average weekly wage. The wage replacement decreases as average weekly income increases.

“Right now, many people who qualify for unpaid leave report it is essentially inaccessible to them because they cannot afford to support themselves and their families without a paycheck while they are out on leave,” said Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon (D-Woodburn). “This means a quarter of new mothers are going back to work within two weeks of having a baby. Families are going into debt, spending down their whole savings or retirement accounts, or relying on government assistance to cover unpaid time away from work during critical life events, and folks quit their jobs, knowing the long-term financial consequences will be devastating.”

The paid family and medical leave insurance program offers a definition of family member that better captures the nature of today's family structures and relationships and requires employment protections, so that workers cannot be retaliated against for taking this type of leave.

“Oregon families work hard to earn a living and raise kids,” said Rep. Rachel Prusak (D-West Linn). “Most Oregonian families are one serious, life-changing event away from real trouble. We should not be forcing families to choose between caring for their loved ones or face economic ruin. Paid Family Medical Leave would provide a very basic safety net for families in their most vulnerable moments.”

Currently, seven states and the District of Columbia offer, or will soon offer, some form of paid parental or family leave. The United States is one of the new economically advanced nations in the world that does provide this benefit.

Joining Rep. Williamson as a chief sponsor of the bill are Sen. Kathleen Taylor (D-Portland), Rep. Teresa Alonso Leon (D-Woodburn), and Rep. Daniel Bonham (R-The Dalles). Among the sponsors of the bill are Rep. Jeff Barker (D-Aloha), Rep. Paul Evans (D-Monmouth and Independence), Rep. Julie Fahey (D-West Eugene and Junction City), Rep. Mitch Greenlick (D-Portland), Rep. Paul Holvey (D-Eugene), Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer (D-Portland), Rep. Susan McLain (D-Forest Grove), Rep. Mark Meek (D-Oregon City), Rep. Tiffany Mitchell (D-Astoria), Rep. Courtney Neron (D-Wilsonville), Rep. Carla Piluso (D-Gresham), Rep. Karin Power (D-Milwaukie), Rep. Prusak, Rep. Andrea Salinas (D-Lake Oswego), Rep. Tawna Sanchez (D-Portland), Rep. Sheri Schouten (D-Beaverton), Rep. Marty Wilde (D-Central Linn and Lane Counties), and Rep. Anna Williams (D-Hood River).

The bill, which passed 43 to 15, now goes to the Oregon Senate for consideration.

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