

FARRAH CHAICHI
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 35



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 28, 2024

Timothy G. Sekerak
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Vote Explanation on SB 1515

Dear Chief Clerk Sekerak,

The workers of Oregon *are* the Oregon economy – not just its backbone. Our whole economy depends on our workers. We all have been workers, spending our lives to make our state more livable, safe, and enjoyable to live in. Our responsibility to Oregon workers is to provide livable pay, safe working conditions, and economic security.

However, SB 1515 appears to roll back key protections. Unions, whose sole mission is to advocate for workers, submitted neutral testimony on SB 1515. But the concerns in their testimony did not leave me feeling neutral. After careful consideration and review I chose to vote “nay” on SB 1515.

Economic security includes certainty that your position will still be yours when the most difficult and life-changing events otherwise would put your security in question, that you can afford to take leave, and that employers take responsibility for supporting their workers through paid leave. Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA) and Paid Leave Oregon (PLO) provide critical protections for Oregon’s workers.

- Parental Leave
- Serious Health Condition Leave
- Pregnancy Disability Leave
- Sick Child Leave
- Military Family Leave
- Bereavement Leave

I recognize Senate Bill 1515 reflects attempts to resolve some of the complexities that developed as we adopted various state (and federal) leave laws since the early 1990s. I appreciate the efforts of my Senate and House colleagues to find solutions and reach agreement.

I express my solidarity in support of constituents who are frustrated as they attempt to access their PLO benefits, as well as Employment Department workers diligently processing mountains of claims. We need adequate funding for Paid Leave Oregon, to avoid delays and cuts to benefits for those who



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urgently need them. I also note the need to materially support Employment Department workers to further their efforts to process claims and disburse benefits.

SB 1515 contains an important provision for the Oregon Employment Department and the Bureau of Labor and Industries to study and identify additional statutory changes that are needed to resolve these complexities. Fortunately, we should have the results from this report to the interim committees no later than September 15, 2024. I hope that next session we revisit the reductions in benefits within SB 1515 that may harm workers, such as:

- Removal of unpaid, protected leave to care for self or a family member with a serious health condition and unpaid, protected leave to care for an infant or newly adopted or newly placed foster child under OFLA
- No partial-day protections for medical reasons under OFLA
- Reductions to bereavement leave under OFLA
- Removal of additional 12 weeks of sick child leave
- Disparate impacts on undocumented workers

I support SB 1515's clarity and increased protections around bonding and pregnancy disability leave, clarity on unpaid job-protected leave when your child is sick, and clarity on how workers comp and PLO eligibility interact with one another. While the bill offers more clarity around the worker's entitlement "to use any accrued paid sick leave, accrued paid vacation leave or any other paid leave that is offered," the law does not make clear that employees have the right **not** to take accrued paid leave before taking PLO.

I know the complexities of job-protecting leave laws in Oregon are not resolved by SB 1515. As noted above, this bill creates additional challenges to revisit. I look forward to working with colleagues in both chambers to restore protections lost in SB 1515, resolve the complexities of Oregon leave laws in favor of workers, and to provide for the continued solvency of Paid Leave funds.

Respectfully,

Representative Farrah Chaichi, House District 35