



**Testimony of Marilyn Watkins before the Washington State House Labor Committee on HB 1273 - Implementing family and medical leave insurance, January 29, 2015.**

Good morning. I'm Marilyn Watkins of the Economic Opportunity Institute.

It should never be a matter of luck whether a parent can afford to spend the first precious weeks and months of life with their newborn child.

It shouldn't be a matter of luck whether someone can recover from surgery before dragging themselves back to work.

My mother died this past summer, one of Rep. Moeller's constituents. She'd lived with breast cancer for 8 years, staying active and independent, then declined rapidly in her last month. My sister and I were fortunate to be able to take off work and nurse her at home. Our other 3 siblings were able to fly out for only a few days to see her one last time. If we hadn't been there, mom would have had to spend her last weeks in a nursing facility. My father never could have done it on his own.

Caring for a dying parent shouldn't be a matter of luck. Yet most workers only get a few days or weeks at most of paid leave.

5 states have provided disability and maternity leave insurance for all workers in their states for decades, and 3 of those states now have other forms of family leave as well.

Studies show these programs work:

- Women in these 5 states are twice as likely to have **paid** leave after having a baby than women in other states, and they take longer leaves. Among women below 200% of the poverty level, use of paid leave **tripled** in states with disability or family leave insurance.

- New moms in these 5 states had fewer health complications and were more likely to return to work in the year following a birth and to have higher wages over time.
- New fathers also take longer leaves – and that early bonding keeps them more involved in their children’s lives long term.
- Researchers at the University of Washington estimate that the number of mothers and infants receiving TANF in Washington would decrease more than 13% with paid family and medical leave insurance.

With family and medical leave insurance, the state will save with elder care as well.

There’s nothing more important to our future than our children. And building the health and economic security of our families will boost our whole state economy.

Please pass HB 1273. Thank you.