

March 17, 2015

Councilmember Rod Dembowski, Chair
Transportation, Economy and Environment Committee
Metropolitan King County Council
516 Third Ave, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Support for Motion 2015-0102

Dear Councilmember Dembowski,

My name is Liezl Tomas Rebugio and I live in District 9. I am submitting this letter of support as a private citizen and not on behalf of my employer. Although I am not a parent, this is an important issue for all community members, because fair and adequate parental leave policies supports families, helps build stronger communities, and promotes equality. After the birth or adoption of a child, parents will typically want to take some form of extended leave to bond with the new baby and adjust to new responsibilities and this early leave is socially important for a number of reasons.

First, parental leave policies have a significant impact on women's rights. Norms about childcare responsibility are often established in the first few weeks and the type and quality of parental leave available can impact whether childcare work will be equally shared by the parents. In order to establish greater equality between men and women and begin to deconstruct stereotypes that women are better equipped for childcare, we need to provide opportunities for both men and women to establish a solid role in the home. Leave taken more predominantly by women reinforce traditional gender roles. When women take leave following the birth of a child and men do not, it establishes a precedent that women will carry a heavier amount of the work of the home post-birth. For employment purposes, this often means that women are more frequently expected to adjust their work schedules to handle the increased labor at home. Fair parental leave policies will help to avoid situations that can lower women's pay and responsibility at work.

Second, parental leave plans have an impact on gender equality. Historically, women were exclusively offered maternity leave following the birth of a child, because it was assumed they needed time to recover from labor and delivery. In addition, it was expected that they would be the primary caregivers of any children. However, providing maternity leave only to birthing mothers can lead management to assume that women will be absent from the workforce at some point in their career in order to care for family. This expectation can cause, inadvertently or not, discrimination against women in promotion and pay. Parental leave policies can play a critical role in breaking this cycle of sex discrimination. They are fundamental in changing long standing gender stereotypes, because they have the ability to shape gender norms about parenting while parenting habits are initially being formed. In addition, if policies are in place that allows more men to take advantage of parental leave, women may eventually face less discrimination because they will not be the only ones taking leave.

Third, equal parental leave plans promote equality among LGBT parents. Most leave policies distinguish between disability leave granted to birthing women for recovery and parental leave granted to employees to allow bonding with the new child. While women who give birth are in a unique physical situation, personnel policies will have a discriminatory impact if the leave granted to a birthing woman is substantially disproportionate to the leave granted to other parents. Any parental leave plan that grants

an extensive portion of the benefits exclusively to birthing women will disadvantage families that rely on adoption. Offering minimal benefits to non-birthing parents has the effect of devaluing different types of families. Since LGBT families rely on adoption to a greater extent than heterosexual couples, policies should be the same among straight and LGBT families to promote equality.

Finally, Congress and the Washington state legislature understood the significant impact that leave policies have on families when they enacted the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Family Leave Act (FLA), respectively, to combat discrimination by establishing minimum leave standards for certain types of employers. These laws were a good first step towards achieving equality among workers, but they fall short of solving the problem. The statutes do not cover all employers, therefore leaving a large number of workers without access to family and childcare leave. And leave offered by the statutes is unpaid making it an unrealistic option for many families.

It's time for the County to act, and I applaud you for your leadership on this issue. I urge the Committee to support Motion 2015-0102.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Liezl Tomas Rebugio
555 Field Place NE
Renton, WA 98059
206.234.3678
liezlrebugio@gmail.com

Cc: Councilmember Jane Hauge
Councilmember Joe McDermott
Councilmember Kathy Lambert
Councilmember Pete von Reichbauer
Councilmember Larry Phillips
Councilmember Dave Upthegrove