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House Commerce and Labor Committee Work Session

Testimony of Sharon Ness, RN, Union Representative/Lobbyist- UFCW, Local 141

Good Morning Representative Conway and Committee members. Thank you for this time. My name is Sharon Ness. I am a Registered Nurse for 38 years. I currently work in a Tacoma Hospital on weekends. Over the years I have worked with many patients and families through serious illness.

We have seen many changes to medical care with new technologies and procedures which shorten hospital stays. We also have moved many procedures that previously required hospitalization to an outpatient center, bringing the person in early in the morning and sending them home that day to the care of their families.

With new technology and treatments patients are also discharged from the hospital sooner. Today, a person will be treated for appendicitis, have a gall bladder removed or be treated for pneumonia, but hospitalization may be only 3 to 4 days, then discharge. Although these patients have been discharged, it does not mean that they are well and ready to assume their activities of daily living. These people still need help at home getting stronger and fit. Many are discharged on medications for pain, which could have them impaired and a mother not able to care safely for her children. If a patient is ready for discharge and there is no one to help with their continued treatment at home, these patients will be sent to a skilled nursing facility causing more expense. Patients recover faster with family and paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance allows the families to be present in the hospital and afterwards.

It's very important for families to be present when a family member is hospitalized. A large part of patients being sent home early is patient education. As a nurse it's important for a family member to be present. Most patients are medicated and of course just plain ill, so their retention from teaching is minimal - making the family member key. Many times patients are also sent home still needing treatment. Complex dressing changes, tube feedings, good nutritional support all need a family member.

As you can hear this means a family member needs to have time off from their job. Families want to be present and we try to accommodate their working schedules for training, but it is not always possible.

Then you have family members with extremely serious illnesses or injuries needing intensive care treatment. Families are an integral part of the "team" to get their loved ones well. We need their information on the person's regular status of function, allergies, and previous conditions.

Getting well requires family conferences with the physician in order that the needs of patients are met according to their wishes.

Patients also need the emotional support from their families. I have seen many families stress over wanting to be at their parent's bedside and needing to be at work. When an individual is dealing with a sick family member their productivity tends to be lower as their minds are with their families.

Family and medical leave insurance is a good public policy. Children get well faster. Research shows that sick children cared for by a parent have better health outcomes. 55% of mother's of infants are working full-time and 66% of women with children under 6 years are in the workforce. Paid family leave allows them to care for their children when sick especially for those with children with chronic illness. Elderly parents get better care with family and stay out of nursing homes. Paid family leave enables family members to meet their family responsibilities.

Family health care costs are lower when families can address their emergent health needs quickly.

This legislation is a small step to expand unpaid family and medical leave. With families receiving some monies for paid family leave, it will help relieve some of the stresses of being off work - help pay for food, gas, and medications. Not everyone needs this today, but emergencies happen -an injury, heart attack, stroke. Family and medical leave insurance will help families cope.