

March 2007

Testimony on 2SSB 5659 – Family Leave Insurance

My name is Sean O. I am 54 years old. I grew up in Mukilteo, WA and have lived in the area since 1962. My father worked for the Department of the Army Office of Civil Defense, which later became FEMA. My mother was a stay at home mom. They were both smokers. Mom smoked Camel non-filters, and Dad was a chain-smoker. Their medical needs and untimely death were directly related to their smoking habit.

In 1992 our family was hit with two catastrophic illnesses at once. My mother had a heart attack and stroke that was so grave; she was left with severe brain damage. Dad's lungs collapsed from his emphysema and he had to have one of them removed. In 1995 Mom passed away in a nursing home where she received excellent care, and Dad recovered somewhat and remained at home. My brothers and I knew the day would come when Dad's health condition would become more severe, and he would need nursing home care. When the day came to send him to a nursing facility, he refused to go. I was single at the time and lived close. Dad asked me to take care of him, and I could not refuse. Besides being a great public servant, he received the bronze star as an Army Scout in Manila on the Philippines Islands in WWII. His body was being ravaged by diabetes and emphysema, but his mind was as sharp as a tack.

The last three months of his life were the hardest of my life. We had excellent caregivers in the home and Group Health Cooperative was always there for us when we needed them. I managed all his care, and it would have been nice if I could have had some paid leave rather than have to go to work and worry about his well-being. Paid family leave would have been especially helpful for times when caregivers did not show up as scheduled or when Dad's condition took a turn for the worse. The last two weeks were very hard. We had five 911 calls. The last call was because his heart stopped, and I had to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. He died one week later.

The stress of having to choose between caring for my Dad and my job were devastating to my own health. I gained 150 pounds, developed diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and sleep apnea. Paid family leave would have reduced that stress considerably. Thank you- Sean O.