

Family Leave is a very personal issue to me. When I discovered I was pregnant with my first child I had just moved to Seattle to escape a bad relationship. Since I had only been with my employer for a few months, I did not qualify for any paid leave nor did I qualify for unpaid maternity leave. My only choice was to quit my job and collect welfare so I could take care of myself and my newborn child. After three months I could no longer sustain myself and my child on the \$540 I received from TANF and I had to return to paid employment.

When I became pregnant with my second child I was fortunate enough to have some paid time off I could use toward maternity leave and an employer who would allow me to take unpaid time off even though I was not covered by FMLA. After carefully weighing our options, my husband and I decided we could afford for me to take a total of four weeks of maternity leave. This meant saving all of the health and vacation leave I would accumulate over the next nine months so I could have two and half weeks of paid leave and cutting back expenses so we could afford to take another week and half off unpaid.

Unfortunately, things did not go as planned. My son was born six weeks premature. I left work on Wednesday, concerned over sudden pains, and on Thursday I had a tiny newborn baby in need of intense medical care and several decisions to make. One of these decisions was when to take my maternity leave. We now had accumulated less time off than we had planned and we had no idea when Connor would be released from the hospital- it could be days, weeks or even months. There was no way we could take any additional time off unpaid – money was already tight in spite of our two full time jobs. We decided our best option was to wait until Connor came home. I gave birth on Thursday and was back to work on Monday.

For the next three weeks, my days consisted of going to work, leaving early to drive from Kent to Seattle, spending a few precious hours with my new baby, and then fighting rush hour traffic in order to pick up my older son before the child care closed. I worked in the early childhood education field; I was surrounded every day by the research citing how important those first days are for bonding and life long learning. It broke my heart that I could not be with my son when he needed me so much. These were, by far, the most difficult days of my entire life. If I could have had even \$250 a week of replacement wages I would have been able to be with my baby during this critical time.

It is society's duty to protect and care of our most vulnerable: our children, the sick and the elderly. Family and Medical Leave Insurance allows families to do just that- to take care of themselves and/or their families when they are most needed. This is why I urge to vote yes on SSB 5659.

Thank you,

Selena