

**Testimony for Senate Bill 6185 to enact Washington State Family and Medical Leave  
by Steve Olson, Executive Director, Olympia Child Care Center  
January 12, 2006**

Thank you for holding hearings today on this important topic. I am Steve Olson, Executive Director of Olympia Child Care Center here in Olympia. I am speaking to you, however, simply as a concerned citizen.

For many years, I have operated a child care center that employs 40 staff who work with up to 150 infants, toddlers, and young children every day. I see the benefits of family leave from the view of management as well as from the standpoint of working families whose children are in my care.

As many of you know, the state licensing requirements for child care centers are stringent. I must always meet strict teacher-to-child ratios. Even though my business is small, I've been able to set up a system so that I always have qualified substitutes when needed. I do provide family leave to my employees. In fact, just this past month, one of my teachers had to take care of a very ill family member. She's been on unpaid leave for four weeks, just as the legislation before you proposes, and I have found a suitable replacement for her. If I can do this, with such strict operating requirements from the state, all businesses can do this, and they should. But they don't.

As a child care center director, I have seen many parents struggle when their child is sick. No one can anticipate when a child will become sick or when a medical emergency will occur. Yet, with family leave, we can enact this legislation and say to our mothers and fathers that you can take care of your children without worrying that you will lose your job.

One of the key factors of this bill that I am very supportive of is the intermittent leave component. Especially for those children who have a life-threatening illness, like leukemia, which requires intermittent care and regular doctor visits, family leave is so critical to the health and well-being of that child. But my parents tell me that there are just too many employers who are unwilling to provide family leave. Most of the children in my center come from low-income families, with more than two-thirds of them on a state subsidy or internally subsidized. Yet, their mothers and fathers are the least likely to have family leave. These hard-working, low-income parents are the most vulnerable to losing their job in a time of medical crisis.

Caring for a sick child causes extreme stress in and of itself. We all know that. Compounded with the fear of losing a job, the situation is unbearable. For our children, we must do better.

I want to remind the committee that licensed child care facilities are unable to take infants under the age of 4 weeks. Those first 4 weeks are an important time for mothers to bond with their children, establish breast-feeding, and take care of their own post-partum needs. The bill before you will enable more mothers to take this time without worrying that they will lose their jobs.

Family leave is a good policy. It's been working well for more than 10 years throughout the nation, and I've seen it first-hand as an employer and as a nonprofit serving the needs of low-income families in this community.

If my small, highly regulated child care center can make family leave work, then any business can. It's good for business, it's good for our families, and it's good for our children. I urge you to pass Senate Bill 6185.