

Put forth by member of Bakers Local 114

Bill proposes to add 'bereavement' to Family Leave Act

A longtime member of Bakers Union Local 114 is behind a bill in the Oregon Legislature that would expand the Oregon Family Leave Act to allow for up to eight weeks leave to mourn the death of a family member.

The Oregon Family Leave Act was passed by the Legislature in 1995. It requires employers of 25 or more employees to provide their workers with job-protected leave (up to 12 weeks) to care for themselves or a family member in cases of illness, injury, childbirth and adoption, or when on military call to duty or on leave from active duty. A family member can be a child, spouse, domestic partner, parent, parent-in-law, grandparent, or grandchild.

The leave is unpaid, although there are provisions that allow a worker to tap accrued sick and vacation pay.

Robin Zimmerman, 50, is a 31-year member of Bakers Local 114 employed at Oroweat. In May 2008, he lost his wife to cancer. Her death impacted him and their young daughter deeply. Zimmerman was fortunate to have strong support from his employer,

his union, and from co-workers, but it opened his eyes to the fact that the standard leave for mourning among employers is just three days.

"I don't know if all employers do the right thing. Mine told me to take as long as I needed," Zimmerman said. "What I did realize, though, was there was nothing in writing."

Employers don't always do the right thing.

In California, Senate Majority Leader Ellen Corbett introduced a bill this session to include bereavement leave. She cited several instances in which employees were fired for missing work following a death in the family. In one case, an employee took family and medical leave to care for her sick father. When her father died, she attended his funeral. When she returned to work, her employer informed her that her family leave had ended upon her father's death. She was fired. In another case, an employee's husband died suddenly. She took off for a few days to fly home to bury him — and was fired immediately upon her return to

work.

In Portland, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 has a grievance pending against TriMet for denying funeral leave.

Zimmerman says, from his experience, three days away from work just isn't enough. The initial shock can leave families unable to function with their daily lives. "Even the basic chore of fixing and eating meals disappears into a fog," he said.

It was his personal experience that led Zimmerman to the crusade to change the law.

He remembered reading an article about an expansion of the Oregon Family Leave Act. "Why couldn't bereavement be included in that law?" he asked himself. Zimmerman consulted with the head of the Bakers Union, Terry Lansing, about how to get a bill in the Legislature. He did some research on the Oregon Family Leave Act, then called his state senator.

Zimmerman told the Labor Press many people he talked to were unaware that bereavement leave wasn't covered

under the act — state or federal.

Zimmerman talked with Sen. Brian Boquist (R-Dallas) in spring of 2009 and asked him to sponsor a bill. They met and, eventually, SB 506 — The Grief Recovery Bill — was hatched. It was filed pre-session and has been assigned to the Business, Transportation, Economic Development Committee.

The bill would amend the Oregon Family Leave Act to allow an immed-

iate two weeks off following the death of a family member, with the ability to get more time — up to eight weeks — if approved by a physician.

Zimmerman doesn't know if the bill will pass, but he's asking union members and others who support the idea to call their legislators and ask them to do so, too.

For more information about the bill, go online to www.griefbill.orbs.com.

...TriMet stops mediating grievances

(From Page 1)

the governor asking for expedited arbitration to get the contract settled.

As Hunt was talking about a possible work stoppage, TriMet board president Richard Van Beveren interrupted, telling him to wrap up quickly, otherwise, he would adjourn the meeting.

Board member and Teamsters official Lynn Lehrbach attempted to ask a question, but Van Beveren refused it.

"I'm not recognizing your question," Van Beveren said.

"You're shutting me off, Mr. Chairman?" Lehrbach asked.

"Yes," Van Beveren retorted, saying that the board had already allowed several members to speak. "I think we have given ample time, we have been very patient, and you keep going, Jon."

In a heated exchange, Hunt said union members would not sit idly by and watch TriMet continue to break the law. He said they will attend every board meeting, with everyone signing up to testify to make sure their voices are heard.

"If we have to shut this city down, that's exactly what we're going to do," he said.

The union raised two other issues at the board meeting. The first concerned the safety of Type 4 light-rail trains. The union contends that the framing of the cab creates significant visual obstructions for operators, resulting in them "driving blind."

"Until these serious safety defects are corrected, we will demand that TriMet indemnify all operators from any disciplinary actions arising out of situations which implicate the Type 4

problems," said ATU Financial Secretary Evette Farra.

The second issue was over a recent notice by TriMet that it will no longer mediate grievances that are scheduled for arbitration.

Hunt said it is irresponsible for management, which is claiming poverty, to refuse to mediate workplace disputes. He said the average cost to mediate a grievance is \$300, while the traditional arbitration process costs TriMet about \$22,000 per grievance. Currently there are 91 grievances pending.

"TriMet is now forcing these cases

to full-blown arbitration at an estimated cost to taxpayers of over \$2 million, while they could resolve the same 91 grievances through mediation for a total cost of around \$27,300," Hunt said.

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