Meeting:	**Paid Leave Oregon Advisory Committee**
Date/time:	**08/06/2026 | 1:00-2:30 p.m.**
Location:	Microsoft Teams
Attendees:	P (Present) A (Absent) S (Sent Sub) N (Notetaker)
	Facilitator: Juan Serratos Scribe: Michael Orosco

	Members		**Staff**		**Guest**
P	Juan Serratos	N	Michael Orosco	P	Shelby Felton
P	Andrew R. Stolfi	P	Tjorven Sievers	P	Steven Ferenczy
P	Amanda Dalton (employers)	P	Monica Torres	P	Lauren Grace
P	Jenny Dresler (employers)	P	Ayesha Khalid	P	Alicia Henry
P	Rich Reynolds (employers)	P	Kandi Quezada	P	Paloma Sparks
P	Scott Winkels (employers)	P	Karen Humelbaugh	P	Cheryl Carder
P	Odalis Aguilar-Aguilar (employees)	P	Alexandra Ball	P	Michael Graham
P	Delina Biniam (employees)	P	James Barta	P	Breanna Scott
A	Anna Richards Roberts (employees)	P	Jack Patterson		
P	Catie Theisen (employees)	P	Jennifer Oswald		
		P	Anne Polak		
		P	Kaitlynn Chritton		
		P	Kaia Shire		

Agenda/Notes

Docket #	Topic	Purpose	Presenter
1.0	Welcome & Introductions	Inform	Juan Serratos
1.1	Member Roundtable		
1.2	Approval of May Notes		

Juan

Slide 1 – Welcome

- Welcome everyone and thank them for joining.
- Acknowledge Advisory Committee members, agency leadership, presenters and members of the public.
- Briefly note that today's meeting includes the 2027 contribution rate discussion, an update on the website refresh and a broader look at program performance.
- Transition to the agenda.

Slide 2 – Agenda

- Let me quickly walk us through today's agenda.
- Today's meeting is focused on how Paid Leave Oregon is planning for the future.

- First, we'll discuss the 2027 contribution rate. We'll begin a broader conversation about what level of trust fund reserves should guide future rate-setting decisions, review the financial outlook and share the staff recommendation for the coming year.
- Next, Jack Patterson, our communications Officer will provide an update on the Paid Leave website refresh. He'll cover what we heard from customers and staff, how that feedback is shaping the new structure, and what work comes next.
- Finally, we'll review program performance. That discussion will include the health of the trust fund, benefit and application trends, customer-service performance, and updates on the Connector and assistance grant programs.
- We'll leave room for questions and discussion throughout the meeting.
- But first, we'll begin with a few opening items: introductions around the table, a member roundtable, and approval of the May meeting notes.
- Let me start by turning to introductions.
- May Notes approved

2.0	**Agency Update**	Inform	Andrew Stolfi

Andrew

- HT budget. We were an early submitter agency. It's available on our public website. Paid Leave program is status quo for budget. Focus is continuing to improve on customer service.
- Customer service update. Issued OED action plan in March of this year. Andrew just passed one year at the agency and on day one the governor charged him with focusing on customer service, particularly in UI and Paid Leave.
- Action plan consists of 101 different action items to improve customer service.
- Optimize Frances system, set a recommendation on the workforce side; improving workforce operations, workforces offices and on the state's workforce mission.
- Prioritized half of the actions items to start right away.
- The rest scheduled as resources became available.
- Put a link of the action plan in the chat.
- There is a Paid Leave section as well as shared projects that impact the agency as a whole.
- Customer Service and Workforce Strategies Action Plan: https://www.oregon.gov/employ/Agency/Pages/Customer-Service-Workforce-Strategies-Action-Plan-.aspx
- Work has started on the Healthcare Provider interface. Will improve how customers can submit healthcare information to the Paid Leave program. Started interfacing with healthcare providers around this.
- The "Top 6" are highlighted here, as well: Prioritized and Active Projects
- OED2 – Group of AI specific projects. Internal and external. Improves customer experience/service.
- One of these called "Easy on hold". Implementing now. Hold time program that can deliver messages. Can also feed us information and allows us to pivot messages that customers get while on hold. Ex. If getting lots of calls about specific issue that is answered on the website, we can change the message to direct customers there, so they don't have to wait on the phone.
- Also piloting internal knowledge chat bots. Will help staff answer customers questions and resolve customer issues. Not only will answer staff questions but will also reference the resources that were used to find the answers.

- Next we are currently working on updating all of our customer facing communications. Ex. Letters in our Frances system. Close to 1000 different letters between UI, Paid Leave and CNR divisions. Updating to make the letters easier to understand, produce less questions and frustration. Many of the letters are interconnected. Could be one paragraph that appears in 300 different letters.
- Taking phase approach. Maybe 10-20 at a time that cause the most confusion and questions and fixing those first.
- Mapping out connected letters so changing one group changes another group without our knowledge.
- Next working on Live Claims Status Tracker
- Customers ask a lot about their status. This will answer those questions. Where is my claim, what's the status? Will reduce a lot of phone time answering these questions.
- Will allow a customer to log into their Frances account and see where their claim is.
- Next working on assisting Work Source Offices with UI and Paid Leave customers that come in for assistance.
- Paid Leave is doing great job piloting and expanding a program to put Paid Leave staff in Work Source offices to provide on site assistance. Currently exploring what we can do on the UI side to help customers.
- Myself (Andrew), Karen (OED Deputy Director) and Sarah (OED Chief of Staff) have all done shadowing at Work Source offices in the last two months.
- Seen firsthand that about half of the customers coming into WSO's are UI customers.
- WSO staff are not trained or even permitted to do a lot of things that those customers need help with.
- We have about 8-10 different initiatives to address this.
- Data collection and data analysis. In progress with a lot and have already implemented some.
- Very critical to making best decisions about changes to staff and our programs to better serve customers.
- Increasing our ability to access data, access data quicker and incorporate that data into our decision making.
- Last one, federal law called WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act), provides funding to states to offer services to job seeker and/or those seeking improvements in their careers.
- We get a lot of funding through one of the titles. Currently Department of Labor gives the money to HECC, who then gives to local boards, and there's 9 local boards that contract with providers who hire people who work in Work Source offices. We are shift administration and oversight of that title one program from HECC to OED.
- Have already started this process. Formal shift of this will occur next year.

3.0	**2027 Contribution Rate Setting**	Inform	Juan Serratos & Ayesha Khalid

Juan

Slide 3 – 2027 Contribution Rate Setting

- We'll now move into the 2027 contribution rate setting discussion.
- This section will cover two related pieces of work.
    - First, we want to begin a broader conversation about whether Paid Leave should establish a trust fund reserve target to help guide future rate-setting decisions.

  - Then, Ayesha will walk us through the 2027 forecast, including the assumptions behind the analysis and the projected trust fund outcomes under several contribution-rate and economic scenarios.
- After that, I'll return to share the staff recommendation and ask for the Advisory Committee's input.

Slide 4 – Trust Fund Reserve Metric

- Before we dive into the 2027 contribution rate, we want to begin a broader conversation about how much the trust fund should hold in reserve to support the program's long-term stability.
- State law requires Paid Leave Oregon to maintain at least six months of projected benefit payments in reserve.
- The trust fund currently has about eight months in reserve, but we have not yet established if a certain reserve level should serve as the program's longer-term operating target.
- One option is to establish a range of months in reserve that could help guide annual contribution-rate decisions.
- For example, if we eventually determined that a range of nine to 12 months provides an appropriate level of stability, we could compare that range with the projected reserve under different contribution-rate scenarios.
- Nine to 12 months is only an example. We are not proposing a specific range today, and we are not asking the committee to select one at this meeting.
- The reserve metric would also not replace the annual actuarial analysis required by statute and rule.
- Our actuary would continue to consider all required data, assumptions and economic scenarios. The reserve range would provide an additional guideline for evaluating whether a lower rate may be feasible.
- We would like to hear your initial thoughts about this approach and what factors you believe should be considered as agency leadership and staff continue developing a recommendation for a future discussion.

Slide 5 – Paid Leave Benefit Assumptions

- Before Ayesha walks us through the 2027 rate forecast, I want to mention:
- After our meeting last August, we received feedback from the committee about how we present this information. We heard that feedback, and we are presenting the assumptions and forecasts in a new way today.
- Please let us know whether these changes are helpful and whether there are additional adjustments you would like us to make in the future.
- I also want to note that we have a system ticket in place to update the methodology we use to calculate average leave duration and the average weekly benefit amount.
- We had hoped to complete that update in time for today's presentation, but it is running slightly behind the rate-setting timeline.
- Once the update is complete, we will let you know whether it changes any of the leave-duration or average-weekly-benefit figures presented here.
- With that, I'll turn it over to Ayesha to walk through the benefit assumptions.

Ayesha

Slide 5 continued – Paid Leave Benefit Assumptions

- To recap, the Oregon Employment Department Director sets the Paid Leave Oregon contribution rate on an annual basis.

- The rate cannot exceed 1% of employee wages up to the Social Security Wage Index cap, which is estimated to increase from $184,500 in 2026 to $190,200 in 2027.
- The contribution rate for the following calendar year must be announced by November 15.
- To determine the contribution rate for 2027, I ran calculations for three rate scenarios – 1%, 0.95%, 0.9% - under the baseline, optimistic, pessimistic, and severe recession economic forecasts provided by the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis and using a number of revenue and expenditure assumptions.
- This thorough analysis is meant to ensure that we have a complete picture of what the financial outcomes for the trust fund look like under different circumstances.
- The analysis was peer-reviewed by my colleagues, including the actuary for the Unemployment Insurance and our Research division.
- Before going over the different rate scenarios, I want to cover the assumptions that go into the contribution rate calculations in a bit more detail. Assumptions include:
    - Revenue assumptions, such as actual contributions, fees, interest and penalty revenue through June 30, 2026, as well as estimated revenue based on forecasts of the Oregon Office Economic Analysis, and
    - Expenditure assumptions, such as benefit payments, grant payments and administrative costs.
- This table shows some key assumptions around program benefit usage and payments. The assumptions for our approved applications uptake, average leave duration and average weekly benefit amount are projected to be the same as in 2026 based on the available data.
- We expect about 150,000 approved applications in 2026, which equals about 411 approved applications per day, and about 8000 approved applications more than in 2026.

Slide 6 – 2027 Contribution Rate Scenarios

- This table shows that every modeled reduction in the contribution rate results in a lower projected trust fund reserve at the end of 2027.
- We modeled three possible contribution rates—1%, 0.95% and 0.9%—under four economic forecasts provided by the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis.
- Those forecasts are baseline, optimistic, pessimistic and severe recession.
- At the current 1% contribution rate, the trust fund is projected to remain at or around eight months of reserve under all four economic forecasts.
- At a 0.95% rate, the reserve is projected to fall below eight months under every forecast.
- At a 0.9% rate, the reserve is projected to decline to approximately seven months under every forecast.
- The precise balance varies depending on the economic outlook, but the overall pattern is consistent: lowering the rate reduces the fund's projected reserve.
- The next slides show how those differences develop over a longer, three-year period

Slide 7 – Trust Fund Balance Forecast 2027-2029

- I'll now walk through the projected trust fund balance and reserve over the next three years under the three contribution-rate scenarios: 1%, 0.95% and 0.9%.
- For this part of the presentation, we are showing the baseline economic forecast, meaning we are not assuming either an optimistic or pessimistic economic outlook.
- We also completed the analysis under the optimistic, pessimistic and severe-recession forecasts. We shared that full analysis with you earlier this week, but we are limiting today's presentation to the baseline forecast for the sake of time.
- This graph shows the projected trust fund balance and reserve from 2027 through 2029.
- The bold black line shows the trust fund's actual balance beginning in January 2024.
- The dotted black line shows the projected balance at the current 1% contribution rate.
- The green dotted line shows the projected balance at a 0.95% rate.

- The orange dotted line shows the projected balance at a 0.9% rate.
- The solid black line shows the balance needed to maintain the required six months of projected expenditures.
- The numbers at the end of the dotted lines show the projected months of reserve at the end of 2029 under each rate.
- At a 1% contribution rate, the trust fund is projected to grow slowly and reach about 8.4 months of reserve in 2029.
- At a 0.95% rate, the reserve is projected to decline to about 6.8 months.
- At a 0.9% rate, the reserve is projected to fall to just over five months, below the required six-month reserve.

Slide 8 – Trust Fund Balance Forecast 2027-2029

- This table provides a more detailed look at the projected trust fund balance and months of reserve under the 1%, 0.95% and 0.9% contribution-rate scenarios.
- As with the previous slide, these projections use the baseline economic forecast and cover 2027 through 2029.
- At the current 1% contribution rate, the fund balance is projected to continue growing slowly, reaching approximately $744 million and 8.4 months of reserve by the end of 2029.
- At a 0.95% contribution rate, the reserve is projected to fall below eight months in 2027 and continue declining by roughly half a month each year.
- By the end of 2029, the 0.95% rate is projected to leave approximately 6.8 months of reserve.
- At a 0.9% contribution rate, the reserve is projected to fall to just over seven months in 2027 and then decline by about one additional month each year.
- By the end of 2029, the 0.9% rate is projected to leave approximately 5.2 months of reserve, below the required six-month reserve level.

Slide 9 – Paid Leave Staff Recommendation

- Based on the available data, Paid Leave Oregon staff recommends keeping the contribution rate at 1% for 2027.
- We believe this is the responsible choice because it protects the stability of the trust fund while the program is still maturing and benefit utilization is still developing.
- The financial projections support that recommendation. At the current 1% rate, the trust fund is projected to remain at approximately eight months of reserve through 2029.
- By comparison, a 0.95% rate would cause reserves to decline each year, reaching about 6.8 months by 2029. A 0.9% rate would reduce reserves to about 5.2 months—below the required six-month level.
- Those projections matter because Paid Leave Oregon is still only about three years old. Public awareness continues to grow, applications have increased each year, and we do not yet know where benefit utilization will level off.
- Average weekly benefit amounts are also relatively high—about $1,000 for approved, monetarily eligible claims in every leave type other than safe leave.
- There is additional uncertainty coming in 2027 because of the federal tax changes affecting medical leave.
- Medical leave benefits will no longer be taxable and must be funded through employee contributions alone. We will need to monitor whether that change affects medical-leave applications and benefit costs.
- We also have not yet established a long-term reserve metric we discussed earlier. Until we have that framework—and more experience with how Oregonians use the program—lowering the rate would reduce the fund's cushion without a clear basis for determining that the remaining reserve is sufficient.
- Maintaining the 1% rate preserves a stable trust fund, minimizes the risk of future rate volatility and gives us more time to understand utilization before making a change.
- We would now like to hear your questions and comments, as well as your recommendation to the director.

- The Advisory Committee has an important role in advising the director on the contribution rate, and we appreciate your insights.
- Director Stolfi will consider both the staff recommendation and the Advisory Committee's recommendation before making the final decision for 2027.
- After this discussion, I'll turn it over to Jack for an update on the Paid Leave Oregon website refresh.

Questions/Comments/Answers

Amanda – is the departments perspective that our reserve of 6 months is the floor and there's a desire to go up? Talking about rate setting, I would love for this to be the first year we are below 1% because you do have healthy reserves. What I'd like to better understand is: Why are we having this conversation? Are we going to have it every year? Have you had legislative conversations about the fact that the agency is looking to go beyond legislative direct to do 6 months?

Juan – No. This is just the start of the conversation. We are not intending to make a decision in the next month or anything like that. We want to explore if it's feasible to establish a trust fund balance that we feel is robust enough to ensure the sustainability of the program. The law requires a minimum of 6 months reserve. This is more of a conversation we want to have but since we are losing half the committee members shortly we will make sure to come back to this topic in future meetings to discuss further.

Rich – Thank you for the information in the slides. It makes complete sense to me to continue with the 1% contribution rate at this time based on the trust fund reserve. It aligns with what other programs that I've seen outside of Paid Leave. Based on the data you're providing and the forecasts, I support the 1% and thank you for the transparency.

Andrew – I wanted to respond to some things Amanda said, and I have a question for her and others. I was not engaged in the legislative discussions when Paid Leave was created. It would be great for anyone who wants to share more on it. My reading of the statute is, as Juan said, it creates a floor. It says a minimum or at least 6 months or reserve, so I have been looking at that as the legislatures established a floor and we have to be at least that, and we'd benefit by discussing what do we think the upper range or ceiling target of that to be? Ex. At DCBS the PAOA assessment rate had a minimum of 12 months, so since it was a higher minimum, it didn't have a higher an upper band. I would really benefit from, and maybe others would as well, to discuss what the legislative intent or discussions were. Also, you asked if we are intending to go to the legislature with this question? We haven't because of what the statute says but there's always that possibility for that discussion if others wanted.

Amanda – I believe Karen and Paloma and maybe others were there. I actually think we added this more recently that the original implementing bill. I think it was done in the last couple of years as part of Senator Taylor's package of reforms. I only pointed it out because I thought we had the discussion when we the figures for the program and 6 months wasn't a guess, it was based on actuals and the level of comfort on what the funds could be there to be used. My bigger concern is, it's always nice to have 8 months over 6, but I don't want to 8 months to be used to say we can never go below 1%. 2027 seems like the best year to put more money back into the pockets of employers and workers. And if we are collecting to just collect, I would rather make that a lower rate because we haven't gone below 1%. I am concerned about us making that number higher. Hopefully this is not used to every year to influence that 1%.

Karen – I want to clarify how the statute is phrased, if Tjorven is here? I think it says, "6 months ability to pay benefits"? It's phrased a little different than reserve?

Tjorven – My understanding is this was in the original statute, but what was added a couple years ago with the solvency levers, if we are at risk of becoming insolvent or going below 6 months reserve, we have certain actions we can take in regard to the trust fund. That was a new addition, but the 6 months reserve has been in there.

Paid Leave Oregon

Andrew – I put the text of what the statute says in the chat.

"At the end of the period for which the rates are effective, the balance of moneys in the fund is an amount not less than six months' worth of projected expenditures from the fund for performance of the functions and duties of the director under this chapter;"

Tjorven (posted in chat) – Sharing a link to HB 2005 (2019) which does include the six months language.

Jenny – I just wanted to echo what Amanda said. We've never gone below the 1% and the intent wasn't to hold it there forever if we had that ability and eventually we would like to see a little bit of movement on that rate if solvency allows.

Juan – That makes sense. It's a difficult situation because Paid Leave is only 3 years old and we continue to see the number of claims being filed increase every quarter. It puts us in a difficult situation. We will definitely come back to this conversation in future meetings.

Jenny – Were setting the rate every year right?

Juan – Yes.

Jenny – So for the .95 and the .90 that you are projecting, you're still above the statutory requirement? Doesn't that mean that we couldn't change the rate? It seems like there is a real opportunity to help folks, both local and small businesses and employees, get a little bit more money in their pockets because we don't need all that extra money in reserve. Especially at the .95 you're still at 7 months through 2029. Why are we so high centered on this 8% number?

Juan – I do have some insight in just a second as I share why the staff are recommending the 1%.

Scott – I appreciate what you are saying about volatility but if we're setting the rates every year and your projections for the end of 2028, at .90, are still at 6 months, assuming you were looking at program utilization numbers and factoring in a potential increase, that's a pretty healthy number. I'm also nervous about going to legislative session in 2027 with an overfunded reserve (above 6 months) because I think this fund is susceptible to a legislative sweep. I don't know what we would get out of keeping this above the required 6 months. Again, we set the rate every year, so this is an opportunity to provide a modicum of savings to the people who are funding the system, and it doesn't appear by your graph that we've jeopardized the systems health.

Amanda –You do keep talking about increased utilization. I am curious if you're seeing increase payers as well? Are we seeing new workers come into the system and how do those numbers balance based on increased claims?

Tjorven – I don't have an answer for that right now, but we can get back to you on that.

Catie – Who has the jurisdiction to decide this issue?

Andrew – I can jump in. Per statute I, the OED Director, get to set the rate each year. Juan mentioned this but I wanted to stress this: I absolutely have not made a decision. The things I am looking for to make a decision is 1) the numbers, data, forecasts and projections that Ayesha has put together. 2) a recommendation from staff. 3) a recommendation from this committee. So, I would like all those things before I make a decision, which I certainly have some time until that decision has to be made.

Rich – Another thing I want to call out that I think you mentioned earlier, this program is 3 years old. It's not a mature program and is something you need to think about going forward. This data and the projections are very fair and actuarily sound. This isn't someone just throwing something at the wall and hoping it sticks. Just because the floor is 6 months, I wouldn't say its significantly overfunded. It's not like you're sitting at 18 months reserve. Not preaching at anybody but think about if this would risk the health of the trust fund.

Andrew – I asked staff to put together not only the three potential rates but also the 4 different economic scenarios. And I've been doing rate setting for years now and I certainly can't predict what the economy is going to be like in the next year or two, that's why I think its important to look at those scenarios. I'm curious if anyone has any thoughts among the different economic scenarios or an approach to that economic scenario work. If you were the director making a decision, how would you view those scenarios and rates? More conservative or optimistic? Somewhere in the middle?

Catie – I feel like Juan's point on the unknown of 2027 feels like an important data point. I would be happy to have this conversation after we get through 2027 and the shift from the federal government, but I do think we should always be assuming a pessimistic forecast. Because that feels like the fiscally responsible thing to do. I hear you Scott about the reserve not being too big but it also feels like there's a lot of unknown variables. So why would be change the rate right now with all those variables, knowing that we will have this conversation again when perhaps more variables are know?

Delina – I haven't heard of any optimistic forecasts coming up in quite some time and with this being such a new program, I am hesitant to make any drastic changes. Especially economically, Oregon has been through a roller coaster over the past couple years, both on the employee side and the employer side. I am curious, I know each states programs are different, but curious about when states made those decisions to change contribution rates, whether higher or lower. I think after the 2027 legislative session we should go back to possibly lowering the contribution rate. Right now, I feel like it's way too soon to make a change.

Catie (posted in chat) – Based on the pessimistic and severe recession graphs, .9 and .95 would put us out of compliance w the law in 2028.

Rich (posted in chat) – Some additional food for thought: keeping at 1% to ensure program and legislative requirement compliance, economic outlook uncertainty, etc. by ensuring the fund is stable and funded properly will allow for future state discussions and potential rate decreases as the program matures and stabilizes over time. The last thing that I believe participants (employers and employees) would want is a situation where there is a lack of appropriate funding, and then special assessments would be necessary to bring the fund back into compliance. That is a distinct possibility if rate decrease occurs too early in a program and obviously has a negative downstream financial impact for all participants if such assessment would be deemed necessary.

Juan – Thank you all for the feedback. As always if you have any other specific feedback or recommendation, feel free to reach out to us.

4.0	**Paid Leave Website Refresh Update**	Inform	Jack Patterson

Jack

Slide 11 – Feedback We Received

- Over the past several months, we've gathered feedback through focus groups with customers, frontline staff and community partners, along with surveys and a card-sort exercise involving 107 participants.
- The feedback was remarkably consistent.
- People generally see the website as useful and full of good information. The problem is that it is hard to find what you're looking for. Particularly if you're not sure what you're looking for.
- People described unclear navigation, dense pages, unfamiliar terminology, weak search results and too many clicks for common tasks.

- They also told us that mobile navigation, language access, and moving between the Paid Leave website and Frances Online can create barriers.
- **The basic lesson is that our website currently assumes too much knowledge.**
- We often present people with program categories and ask them to decide what they need. Do they need family leave, medical leave, safe leave or pre-placement leave? Do they need a verification form, an equivalent plan or information about eligibility?
- Those terms are meaningful to us because we work with the program every day. But someone visiting the website for the first time may not know which term describes their situation—and they should not need to learn our vocabulary before they can get help.

Slide 12 – What That Tells Us About Structure

- Our surveys all confirmed that organizing the site first around the audience makes sense: individuals and families, employers, self-employed people and health care providers. Home can provide basic orientation, while supporting information can live in the footer.
- But those top-level sections are only the filing cabinets. We still need to design how someone finds the correct drawer.
- The guiding principle within each section will be **questions and follow-up questions**.
- Instead of beginning with, "What information do you need?" the website should begin with, "Who are you?" and then, "What is going on?"
- For an individual, that might mean asking:
- Are you preparing to take leave, already applying or managing an existing claim?
- Are you welcoming a child, dealing with your own health condition, caring for someone else or dealing with a safety issue?
- If someone says a child is joining their family, we can ask whether that is through birth, adoption or foster placement. That allows us to introduce pre-placement leave when it is relevant. The customer does not have to arrive already knowing that "pre-placement leave" exists.
- The same principle applies throughout the site. We ask questions in ordinary language, use the answers to narrow the path and introduce the official program terms only when they become useful.
- We are also looking at how other states help people orient themselves. Washington begins its help center with "How can we help?" and then asks whether the person wants help for individuals and families or for employers. Massachusetts repeatedly uses "What would you like to do?" and provides clear "Start here" pathways within audience-specific sections. We are not copying another state's website, but those are useful examples of organizing around the visitor rather than around the agency's internal structure.
- From there, the broader design principle is simple: **simple language, simple pages and simple paths**.
- That includes improvements beyond the navigation itself. One significant issue we heard about is the transition between the Paid Leave website and Frances Online. Today, someone may click an "Apply Now" button and suddenly arrive in a separate system, without enough explanation of where they are going or what they should have ready.
- Our direction is to make that handoff more deliberate. Rather than sending someone immediately from "Apply" into Frances, we would first take them to a clear **How to apply** page. That page can explain what Frances is, what information and documents the person will need, what they should expect during the application and what other options are available. Then, when they enter Frances, it feels like the next step in one process rather than an unexpected jump to another website.
- We have the broad structure. The next phase is doing the detailed work: developing and testing those question-based paths, simplifying the content and making sure the website can guide someone who has never heard of Paid Leave Oregon before.

Questions/Comments/Answers

Scott – As you are going through this process and doing the refresh, would it be possible for you to put a focus group together of our practitioners who deal with the website every day, run them through it and get feedback from them directly? I would imagine the labor side might be interested in something similar with their workers.

Jack – Absolutely we are always looking for more feedback. I'd be happy to follow up after this and talk about something like that.

5.0	**Quarterly Program Performance**	Inform	Juan Serratos & Monica Torres

Juan

Slide 13 – Program Performance

- Before we review the current trust fund and performance data, I want to briefly update you on Paid Leave Oregon's biennial program implementation report.
- The report is required by statute. The previous report was submitted on July 1, 2024, and we are now developing the next version.
- We expect to submit the report to the Legislature by September 30, 2026.
- I also want to note that we have added benefit and performance metrics to today's presentation in response to the committee's feedback about the information Washington presents to its advisory committee.
- At the November meeting, we plan to add more detailed contribution and trust fund information.
- We'll now move into an update on program performance.
- We'll begin today's performance update with Monica and the Connector Program.

Monica

Slide 14 – Connector Program: Impact Snapshot

- The Connector Program is helping customers overcome practical barriers and complete key steps in the Paid Leave process.
- From January through June 2026, Connectors served more than 1,500 people across Oregon.
- Most appointments were provided in English or Spanish, reflecting the primary language needs we are seeing in the communities served.
- Technology continues to be the most common reason customers seek help. That includes setting up accounts, uploading documents and completing online forms.
- More than two-thirds of customers do not need any further action after their appointment.
- That tells us the Connector model is doing what it was designed to do: resolving issues in person, helping customers move forward and reducing the need for additional follow-up.
- The next slide shows how participation increased between the first and second quarters of this year.

Slide 15 – Connector Program: Participation

- Participation in the Connector Program increased significantly during the first half of 2026.
- Connectors served 655 individuals in the first quarter and 910 in the second quarter.
- That is an increase of 255 people, or nearly 39%, from one quarter to the next.
- The growth reflects increasing awareness of the program and continued demand for in-person assistance at WorkSource Oregon locations.

- This steady increase in participation reinforces that the Connector model is meeting a real need in communities across the state.
- We are continuing to strengthen the program, so more customers can access this support when they need it.
- The next slide covers several of the steps we have taken to expand and improve that service.

Slide 16 – Connector Program Updates

- Over the last quarter, we have continued strengthening and expanding the Connector Program.
- Internally, all Public Service Representatives who answer phones are now trained to schedule Connector appointments.
- That helps ensure customers receive consistent and accurate information about Connector services, regardless of which representative they speak with.
- Customer feedback also continues to be overwhelmingly positive.
- Customers regularly describe Connectors as patient, kind and helpful. Many have told us they would have felt lost or would not have been able to complete their claims without in-person assistance.
- That feedback reinforces the value of the Connector model, and the difference staff are making for customers every day.
- We also expanded the program's geographic reach in July by launching a new location in Grants Pass.
- Connector services are now available there two days a week, helping us respond more directly to the needs of Oregonians in the southern part of the state.

J**uan**

Slide 17 – Trust Fund Health

- This slide provides a current look at the health of the Paid Leave Oregon Trust Fund.
- We covered some of this information during the contribution-rate discussion, so I'll keep this update brief.
- The main takeaway is that the trust fund remains in a stable position.
- At the end of 2025, the fund had approximately eight months of projected expenditures in reserve.
- We currently project that reserves will remain at about that level through 2026 and 2027, with the trust fund balance growing modestly from approximately $645 million at the end of 2025 to approximately $661 million at the end of 2027.
- Those projections assume approximately 142,000 approved applications in 2026 and 150,000 in 2027.
- The 2026 assumption works out to approximately 390 approved applications each day.
- Paid Leave is still a young program, and we are continuing to learn how Oregonians use it over time.
- That is why we closely monitor application volumes, benefit payments, administrative expenses and reserve levels as new data becomes available.
- We are encouraged by the current stability of the trust fund and will continue monitoring it closely.
- The next slide provides a broader look at the benefits Paid Leave has delivered since the program launched.

Slide 18 – Paid Leave Benefits to Date

- This slide provides a high-level picture of Paid Leave Oregon's impact since benefits launched in August 2023.
- The main takeaway is that Paid Leave has now issued more than $2.1 billion in benefits to Oregonians.
- Benefit payments have remained substantial each quarter, including approximately $209 million in the first quarter of 2026 and $231 million in the second quarter.
- Since launch, more than 315,000 individual claimants have received at least one benefit payment.
- The number of claimants paid increased from approximately 97,000 in 2024 to more than 110,000 in 2025.
- Through July 21, more than 80,000 claimants had already received payments in 2026, and we expect the year-end total to exceed the 2025 total.

- Paid Leave has also completed more than 357,000 claim decisions since launch.
- That measure includes claims that reached a final outcome—either approved or denied—and does not include claims that are still pending.
- Taken together, these figures show both the scale of benefits delivered and the continued growth in the number of Oregonians using the program.
- The next slide provides more detail about the outcomes of finalized claims.

Slide 19 – Approved and Denied Claims

- This slide shows the outcomes of Paid Leave applications that reached a final decision since the program launched.
- The main takeaway is that approval rates remain high, although the share of denied claims has increased as the program has matured.
- These figures include claims that were determined or redetermined after new information was received.
- Applications that were still pending or had not yet reached a final determination are not included.
- In 2023, approximately 98% of finalized claims were approved and 2% were denied.
- The denial rate increased to 6.1% in 2024, 12.5% in 2025 and 14.2% so far in 2026.
- This increase is generally consistent with data we have seen from other paid leave programs.
- For comparison, Washington reported a denial rate of approximately 19% in February 2026.
- The most common reasons for denial are that the applicant did not meet eligibility requirements or did not complete required tasks within the allotted timelines.
- The next slide looks at finalized claims by leave type.

Slide 20 – Finalized Claims by Leave Type

- This slide shows how finalized claims were distributed by leave type during the four completed quarters from Q3 2025 through Q2 2026.
- A finalized claim is an application that has reached a final decision, either approved or denied.
- Medical leave represented the largest share, with more than 91,000 finalized claims.
- Bonding leave was next, with nearly 38,000 finalized claims, followed by approximately 28,000 family-leave claims.
- Safe leave and pre-placement leave accounted for much smaller portions of the total.
- The total of 158,876 includes finalized applications only. Applications that were still pending as of July 21 are not included.
- This recent distribution is generally consistent with what we have seen since the program launched: medical leave accounts for more than half of finalized claims, followed by bonding and family leave.
- The next slide looks at how application volumes for each leave type have changed over time.

Slide 21 – Applications by Leave Type

- This slide shows how application volume by leave type has changed over the last several quarters.
- Medical leave continues to account for the largest number of applications, followed by bonding leave and family leave.
- When looking at changes over time, applications increased across every leave type from Q3 2024 through Q2 2025.
- In the most recent comparison period, from Q3 2025 through Q2 2026, applications continued to increase for every leave type except safe leave.
- Medical-leave applications increased by 13.9%, and family-leave applications increased by 15%.
- Bonding-leave applications also increased, but at a much slower rate of 2.1%.
- Safe-leave applications decreased slightly, by 1.7%.
- Pre-placement leave became available in 2025, so there is no comparison available for the earlier period. In the most recent period, pre-placement applications increased by 15.2%.

- The overall pattern shows continued growth in applications, particularly for medical and family leave, while growth in bonding leave has begun to level off.
- The next slide introduces the service goals we use to evaluate program performance.

Slide 22 – Performance Goals

- Before we review the individual performance measures, I want to establish the service goals we use to evaluate our results.
- For calls, our goal is to answer 80% within 30 minutes.
- For application processing, our goal is to make an initial decision on 80% of claims within 21 days.
- For customer web messages, our goal is to respond to 80% within five business days.
- We'll use these goals as reference points as we walk through our recent performance in each area.

Slide 23 – Paid Leave Call Volume and Wait Times

- This chart shows that call volume has remained consistently high, while our ability to answer customers within 30 minutes has improved.
- The green bars represent the number of calls answered each quarter.
- The orange line represents the percentage of answered calls that were answered within 30 minutes.
- Although call volume remained high throughout the reporting period, timeliness improved considerably during the first half of 2026.
- By June 2026, approximately 67% of answered calls were answered within 30 minutes.
- That is still below our goal of 80%, but it represents meaningful progress compared with the second half of 2025.
- The improvement means more customers are reaching a representative sooner, even while demand for phone support remains high.
- The next slide provides more detail about call volumes and wait times by quarter.

Slide 24 – Paid Leave Call Times by Quarter

- This table provides a more detailed look at call center performance over the last four completed quarters.
- The main takeaway is that responsiveness improved significantly while incoming call volume remained relatively steady.
- Paid Leave received between approximately 97,000 and 108,000 calls each quarter.
- The number of calls answered increased from about 57,000 in Q4 2025 to more than 68,000 in Q2 2026.
- At the same time, the percentage of calls answered within 30 minutes increased from approximately 35% in Q3 2025 to nearly 62% in Q2 2026.
- Average time to answer also declined from nearly 40 minutes in Q3 2025 to just under 23 minutes in Q2 2026.
- We have not yet reached our goal of answering 80% of calls within 30 minutes, but these results show meaningful improvement in both responsiveness and the customer experience.
- The next slide looks at how quickly we are making initial decisions on applications.

Slide 25 – Average Days from Application to Decision

- This slide shows that we are making initial decisions on applications more quickly, although we have not yet reached our 21-day service goal.
- The chart shows the average number of days from application to initial decision over the last four completed quarters.
- Average decision time improved from approximately 26 days during the second half of 2025 to 23 days in Q2 2026.
- The dashed line represents our goal of making an initial decision within 21 days.

- The table provides another way of looking at the same trend by showing the percentage of applications that received an initial decision within 21 days.
- That percentage increased from 45% in Q3 2025 to 62.6% in Q2 2026.
- We still have work to do to reach our goal of processing 80% of applications within 21 days, but both measures show steady improvement.
- For customers, that means more people are receiving an answer sooner and are spending less time waiting for an initial decision.
- The next slide looks at our response times for customer web messages.

Slide 26 – Web Messaging ***(Meeting concluded after this slide)***

- This slide shows our performance in responding to customer web messages within five business days.
- The dashed line represents our service goal of responding to 80% of messages within that timeframe.
- Performance exceeded the goal in Q3 2025.
- It then fell below the target in Q4 2025 and Q1 2026.
- Performance improved again in Q2 2026, although it remained slightly below the 80% goal.
- The overall trend shows recovery after the decline in late 2025 and early 2026, but we still have work to do to consistently meet the service goal.
- The next slide provides an update on the assistance grant program.

(Talking points for slides 27-30 included to provide insight into the rest of the presentation)

Slide 27 – Assistance Grants to Date

- This slide summarizes the Assistance Grant Program since it launched in September 2023.
- To date, 63 grant applications have been approved and 79 have been denied.
- An additional 66 applications were canceled, either at the employer's request or because the application was incomplete.
- Of the approved grants, 52 supported the cost of hiring a replacement worker and 11 supported wage-related costs.
- Approved funding totals $167,000.
- Of that amount, $156,000 supported replacement workers and $11,000 supported wage-related costs.
- The next slide looks more closely at Assistance Grant activity during the last four completed quarters.

Slide 28 – Assistance Grants: Last Four Quarters

- Assistance Grant activity remained relatively low during the last four completed quarters.
- Three applications were approved in Q2 2026, following no approvals in Q1.
- Four applications were denied in Q2, the same number as in Q1.
- Most approved grants continued to support the cost of hiring replacement workers.
- During this four-quarter period, two grants were approved for wage-related costs, both in 2025.
- Denied applications represent applications that did not meet the program's eligibility requirements.
- The next slide looks at the geographic distribution of Paid Leave applications across Oregon.

Slide 29 – Geographic Breakdown of Applications

- This slide shows that Paid Leave applications generally track the geographic distribution of Oregon's workforce, although there are some important differences.
- The data compares each community type's share of Paid Leave applications with its share of the Oregon workforce.
- It reflects applications received from program launch through June 5, 2026.

- Frontier communities account for 3.3% of applications, which is close to their 4% share of the workforce.
- Urban communities account for 35.8% of applications, also relatively close to their 33% share of the workforce.
- The largest differences are in rural and suburban communities.
- Rural communities represent 37% of Oregon's workforce but account for 24.9% of Paid Leave applications.
- Suburban communities represent 25% of the workforce but account for 35.9% of applications.
- A very small share of applications—0.1%—comes from people outside Oregon.
- The lower share of applications from rural communities may help inform future outreach and program-access efforts.
- We are continuing to improve the demographic information we bring to the committee.
- We will return in November with the remaining demographic data, as well as updated information about self-employed participants and equivalent plans.

Slide 30 – Questions

- This concludes today's agency update.
- We're happy to answer any questions about the contribution rate discussion, website refresh or program performance information presented today.
- Thank you to the Advisory Committee for your questions, feedback and continued guidance.
- Members of the public can find more information at paidleave.oregon.gov or call Paid Leave Oregon at 833-854-0166.