

March 21, 2013
RE: SB 5529, Child Welfare

Co-Chairs Nathanson and Bates, Members of the Committee:

My name is Kerri Stepisnik, and I am currently a Social Service Specialist 1 for Child Welfare in Yamhill County. What that means is I am a Permanency worker that handles child welfare cases after the initial assessment has been completed; usually after parents have been founded for neglect, threat of harm, etc.; and the case has been opened for services as the issue could not be resolved within the first 30-60 days of assessment.

I work with families by referring them to the needed/ appropriate services and working with the families and providers closely. This includes:

- meeting face-to-face monthly with each individual in the family (parents, significant others, children);
- making contact with each of the service providers for attendance, progress and any issues that may arise;
- having contact with all safety service providers (family or friends that check on the family and children frequently and are willing to report any issues to me or the agency);
- attending an array of meetings with ART (Addiction Recovery Team), Chemical Dependency, Adult Mental Health, Counselors for youth, and Probation (Adult & Juvenile);
- attending all court hearings (dependency & criminal) and CRB (Citizen Review Board) hearings every 6 months;
- having contact with the child's school and counselors;
- preparing all court documents, referral forms, and psychological evaluation referral letters;
- making contact with the client's attorney, foster parent, and relatives;
- attending Child Safety meetings, monthly MV WRAP/ New Solutions meetings, Oregon Family Decision meetings (every 90 days), as well as meetings to discuss the child's Individual Education Plan;
- providing or arranging transportation for clients/youth;
- arranging visitations (supervised or unsupervised) and at times supervising visits;
- meeting with my supervisor;
- attending unit meetings, all-staff meetings, and safety committee meetings, as well as our twice weekly huddles
- entering data and updates in OR-Kids;
- writing and updating case plans, including child-specific plans;
- handling funding requests, gas vouchers, bus passes, etc.;
- and filing, answering phones, and returning phone calls.

I am also personally the Domestic Violence Advocate Liaison for Child Welfare in my office, which requires that I attend monthly staffing meetings and weekly

meetings with the DV Advocate, as well as any meetings with drug court, family drug court and pretty much anything else that pops up related to my cases.

I'm allotted 40 hours per week to do my work. It's not enough time! I currently have 19 cases with 25 + kids. These children are located all over Yamhill County, Marion County and Linn County. To break this down that means I have a minimum of 25 kids face-to-face contacts per month, 25 mom face-to-face contacts per month, 25 dad face-to-face contacts, at least 25 foster parent/safety service provider contacts per month, and at least three service provider contacts per month per client. Plus add on significant others, involved relatives or any other legal party to the case (ie: Tribe). On average we have 30 days in a month with at least 8 days of weekend time. Once you take the 8 days off that leaves approximately 22 working days, but don't forget holidays, furloughs, floating furloughs, vacation (if we can manage time off) and heaven forbid we get sick or have a family emergency!

Since December 2012 in Yamhill County our child protective services units' caseload has about tripled! I know one CPS worker who currently has over 79 open assessments. I know another CPS worker who, on a Friday night not to long ago, had to be out on an assessment until 10:30 p.m. and came back in that Sunday and spent 6 hours doing nothing but paperwork to try and make some headway. This is the norm not the exception. Statewide it's been reported that we are only staffed at 67%; in my office we are only at 62%. What that means is at statewide levels each worker is doing to work of 1 ½ workers and in my office it is closer to 1 ¾ workers. I personally feel like I'm in a pressure cooker and the liability issues, safety issues (due to the clientele we work with) and workers' personal physical and mental health issues (stress!) are enormous. I see several of my co-workers at the breaking point and have watched other co-workers already break! You can only push a worker to the edge so many times before they finally jump off.

We as an agency are not only doing a disservice to our families we serve, but to our workers who serve them. Our families are slipping through the cracks and at the current staffing levels there's nothing we can do, except fall through the cracks with them! We are failing miserably and without realistic staffing we will continue to fail and the State will be more and more liable. What will it take for everyone to realize the NEED we have for staffing? Will one of our workers have to be severely hurt on the job by the situations we enter into every day on the job? Will one of our workers have to have a mental break down completely and possibly harm other workers or members of the public? What is the State willing to risk with the current staffing levels or possibly even less with the cuts we are facing?

We are not just numbers! We are public service employees, we are humans, and we matter! Please show us that you think we matter and stop putting us in these situations, stop hurting the workers and stop hurting our families we serve! Give us the staff and tools we need to do our job appropriately and safely, PLEASE! Thank you.