

TO: House Committee on Human Services and Housing  
FROM: Stacy Michaelson, SEIU Local 503  
RE: HB 3445  
DATE: April 3, 2013

Chair Tomei, Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Stacy Michaelson, and I'm a political organizer with SEIU Local 503. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 3445.

Representing child welfare workers at the Department of Human Services, we don't disagree with the intent to ensure that all children who are touched by the child welfare system end up in the best placement possible. However, we do have some concerns over the practical implications of implementing HB 3445.

Child welfare workers at the Department of Human Services are already severely understaffed, with two staff members doing the work of three across the board. In child welfare particularly, this poses a safety risk for clients and a liability for the state. Our members take their work very seriously and are deeply concerned about the sustainability of the current staffing levels. A number of laudable child welfare policy proposals have emerged this session, but with little accompanying discussion of the role of low staffing levels in rolling out said policies.

Our workers are already struggling to keep their heads above water and stay on top of their unrealistically high caseloads. The result has been increased stress and fatigue ultimately leading to increased employee turnover, further exacerbating the strain on the system. In the meantime, children and families aren't uniformly getting the services they deserve when workers simply don't have enough hours in the day to meet the demands of all their clients.

So I encourage you, as you consider HB 3445 and other potential improvements to the child welfare system, to take into consideration the reality of our current staffing levels. If we are going to effectively implement new policies and programs that take more time per case, then we simply need more workers. Without investments in child welfare staff, additional requirements only exacerbate an already dangerous problem. The reality is there are only so many hours available to our workers and an increased investment of time in one area or on one case, must come at the expense of others. This isn't how any of us want our system to operate. But we need to be realistic in our expectations and invest resources where needed if we want to see improvements.

Thank you.