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MEASURE: SB 414
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To: Senate Committee on Workforce
RE: SB 414

Chairs Dembrow and Thatcher, members of the committees, I would like to give testimony in support of Senate Bill 414. As a member of an education paraprofessional union, we live under the constant worry that our jobs will be outsourced to private industry. It seems like there is an army of companies who think they can do our job faster, cheaper, or better. They make quotes and proposals that management loves, but these projects rarely work out as described.

Back in 2006, the hillsboro school board made the decision to outsource custodial services. They went through the normal bidding process and awarded a contract to a company that promised over a million dollar a year in savings. These savings were mainly done through reduced wages and benefits for the workers. The union objected, but without a law blocking this type of outsourcing, there was little the union could do.

When the new work crews came in, we immediately ran into trouble. Bathrooms remained uncleaned for months. Floor waxing over the summer was always behind schedule. Productivity dropped and our schools started to become a filthy mess. There were many reasons that this happened. The low wages didn't attract high quality workers. The manager of the contractors provided little to no oversight. If unexpected food fights happened, there was no extra time given to clean it up. I think the biggest reason for the poor result was that building principals had no managerial authority over the contract worker. They couldn't direct their work and couldn't address problem areas with the contractor. Everything had to go through the contract company which would decide if they wanted to address it.

In this situation, the incentives for the contractor is to do the least amount of work possible. Once the contract starts, the contract company knows it will be difficult to end. If the district wanted to bring custodial services back in-house, they'd have to purchase equipment, hire new workers, and restock the cleaning supplies. As long as the K-12 budget remained underfunded, the district couldn't afford it.

Fortunately, after six years with the contractor, the K-12 budget had recovered enough to where the school board could fund bringing the custodians back in-house. Contracting out to a company that saved money by paying lower wages doesn't work. We need your help to reform the bidding guidelines to prevent cost reduction plans that depend on lowered wages.

Thank you for your time,

Devin Hunter
Union President
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