



March 3, 2015

Co-Chair Bates and Co-Chair Nathanson, my name is Kerri Stepisnik. I am a permanency worker for Child Welfare in DHS and I have done this work for 5 years. I am also a member of SEIU Local 503.

My number one priority is to keep children safe. Secondly, I am responsible for working with families to unify them with their children. I take my job very seriously and I love the work I do. It is not easy work but it is very important work.

I was here before you two years ago asking for increased funding to help alleviate excessive caseloads for frontline child welfare workers. The additional investment you made has had a tremendous impact on our work. Personally, I now have half the caseload that I did two years ago. The number of cases I have is now within the recommended range. Thank you for that investment.

I work with families struggling with drug addiction, mental health issues, child abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and teens in permanent foster care. Many of the families I work with have little education, many are low-income, and many have dealt with a life time of substance abuse. Many of the families I work with are multi-generational meaning that their parents were involved in the child welfare system.

The decisions you make here in the Capitol have real life consequences to the families I serve. The policies you debate and pass impact myself and my colleagues in the work we do every day.

One issue I want to raise is the issue of worker safety. As I mentioned, we work with families when they are in crisis. Unfortunately, this can sometimes lead to situations that put my safety at risk. We have seen an increased in the number of child welfare workers being harassed and even stalked by families they work with. Not every case rises to this level of safety concern but it is important that workers have a path when they do.

HB 3391 and HB 3037 will provide workers the protection and support they need when they experience harassment. Child welfare workers, and many workers at DHS and other state agencies, do really hard work every day. We need the support of the legislature so that we can give 100% to the families that come to us for help.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
LOCAL 503

PO Box 12159
Salem, OR 97309-1259

1730 Commercial St. SE
Salem, OR 97302

6401 SE Foster Rd.
Portland, OR 97206

1.800.452.2146
www.seiu503.org