



March 23, 2015

Representative Shemia Fagan, Chair
House Committee On Consumer Protection and Government Effectiveness
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Chair Fagan and Members of the Committee:

The Professional and Technical Employees (PTE), Local 17, represents approximately 9,000 employees in Washington and Oregon, including about 750 who work for the City of Portland as engineers, planners, technicians, and other similar classifications.

Roughly half of our members are in classifications related to engineering, and as such we have significant experience with the impacts of contracting out professional services by public agencies. Rather than exiting an entire area of business, public employers that outsource engineering work most often do so in order to augment their existing workforce during times of peak demand or to provide specialty services. In professional service contracting, public employers often pay salaries higher than their own employees in the hopes that short-term spending can replace long-term employment commitments.

While some of this contracting is justified, too often we find inefficient use of tax dollars. Short-term agreements are subject to prolonged extensions, lines are blurred between public and private employees regarding oversight roles, and accountability suffers. Finding information in order to review contracts requires time consuming and potentially expensive information requests that may ultimately result in highly redacted information. Spending on contracts is often aggregated and masked behind vague "Professional Services" headings in budgets, providing little to no information on how public money is actually being spent on private services.

HB 3321 seeks to provide basic transparency and oversight for contracted services. It would provide for easily accessible information on how tax dollars are being spent on private contracts in a similar level of detail that agencies must provide in budget documents when spending money on their own employees. Moreover, it would require sufficient staffing to oversee contracts for performance and accuracy, a practice that is crucial for responsible contracting but unfortunately lacking in some agencies.

Representative Shemia Fagan, Chair
March 23, 2015
Page 2

PTE Local 17 believes these steps towards greater transparency and oversight over contracted services provide commonsense protection of taxpayer dollars, and would allow for meaningful public review of areas of budgets that are currently very difficult to decipher. We hope you will join us in supporting this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elliot Levin', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Elliot Levin
Research Director and Legislative Advocate
Professional and Technical Employees Local 17

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