



April 1, 2015

Chair Paul Holvey
House Business and Labor
900 Court St. - State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Holvey and members of the Committee:

My name is Christine Palmer and I am proud to say that I am an Early Childhood Educator who for the past 18 years has provided education and holistic care to children in the most critical formative period of their development. I have worked in a variety of settings both in large and small businesses. I am a member of SEIU, Local 503. I am here today to testify in support of HB 3471.

While this bill will not impact me or my employer, I wanted to be here today to talk about the impact of being a low-wage worker and to also share the story of other workers like me.

For years I worked long hours, at times juggling two or three jobs to make ends meet. Now, after nearly two decades of long days teaching, and late nights completing homework I earn \$13.82 cents an hour and I am one of the lucky ones. Many of my colleagues earn just \$10 to \$12 dollars an hour, not enough to make it on their own. For the bulk of my career I worked for businesses that benefited financially from my low wages.

Like many co-workers at times I have had to rely on state assistance. This felt degrading and frankly seems inefficient. I often wonder how much time and money would be saved if my hard working colleagues and I simply earned a living wage.

Growing up living in modest mobile homes in rural Oregon and Idaho I dreamed that someday I would earn a college education and become a teacher of young children. Those dreams came true, sadly, the American dream I often heard about in my youth proves to be elusive.

My fellow teachers and I are not proud when we apply for food assistance, forbearance, and other programs. We do not want to be dependents. We work hard and feel that we should be able to stand on our own two feet. None of us want to burden our fellow tax payers.

Susan couldn't be here today but asked that I share a few words about her story. It is not that different than mine. She has a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. She recalls working two or three part time jobs plus a full time job to make enough money to get by. She has had to apply for food stamps and juggle money as she tries to decide which bill gets

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paid each pay day and has even had to call local churches to help with money for utilities. There is simply never enough money to pay for everything at one time.

This bill is important because it has allowed me to be here to share my story. Policy makers like you need to know the impacts of being a low-wage worker and what it is like to have to rely on state assistance to get by. We should not incentivize large, profitable corporations' reliance on a low-wage workforce. Oregon tax payers should not foot the bill.

Each and every day I teach children how to be good citizens. I teach them to not be greedy, to be thoughtful of others, and to share our classroom resources in an equitable manner. The spirit of this bill aligns with those very values. As Ben, one of my students might say, "Think about what is most fair and most kind before you act."
Thank You