

Testimony, House Committee on Business and Labor

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Good morning Chair Holvey, Vice-Chair Kennemer, Vice Chair Barton, and members of the House Committee on Business and Labor,

My name is Raahi Reddy and I am a faculty member at The Labor Education and Research Center of the University of Oregon. We are here today to share some of our findings on the impact of erratic and unpredictable scheduling on the low wage working Oregonians we interviewed for our recent report.

For more and more low-wage workers, this is not a matter of imagination, rather this is the reality of their lives—changing schedules, just-in-time scheduling practices, and often nonstandard work hours are increasingly the norm in many industries. Such volatility leaves workers with little consistency in their expected income and unable to plan other aspects of their lives, particularly child care arrangements

*Just-in-time scheduling practices are used for many low-income workers: those who work standard and nonstandard schedules, those who work part-time and full-time, and in industries ranging from manufacturing to healthcare. There is some national data on the extent of unpredictable schedules. A number of studies indicate the practice is pervasive. Data from those studies suggests that 50-59% of hourly workers experience fluctuations over which they had no control. One recent groundbreaking national survey of workers ages 26-32, which included respondents from Oregon, found that 81 percent of part-time workers reported fluctuations in their work schedules and hours, with 49 percent reporting they were given one week or less of advanced notice on work schedules and hours.

In our interviews with 44 low-wage workers in Oregon, 54% experienced changing work schedules, and 69% worked nonstandard hours, and some of these were also subjected to just in time scheduling practices. These practices require workers to be “on-call” to receive notification to come to work, sometimes with just a few hours or days notice. Some workers knew only a week ahead what their schedules and hours would be for the following week.

Our interviews reveal the havoc this creates on family life. Parents struggled to arrange for child care, pay their bills, and create stability for their children and the family as a whole. They experienced higher stress, poor health, and sometimes had to leave jobs because the scheduling was too unpredictable. We share some of their stories here, focusing particularly on the difficulties with child care for these parents.

Erratic and unpredictable work schedules made childcare arrangements extremely difficult and created instability for families.

Terry worked at Walmart for ten years with a constantly changing schedule. She told us: “They’d say you’re going to have a set schedule, and you’d work that schedule for two months, and everybody’s happy, kids are well-adjusted. [And then], ‘We’re going to change your schedule.’” Terry was lucky during much of that time: because her mother took care of the

children (and was paid through Employment Related Day Care). Her mother was able to be completely flexible. However, her mother died suddenly and finding replacement provider was very difficult because of the flexibility required of a child care provider.

Shania had to cope with “just-in-time scheduling” practices: each week she found out what days and shifts she would be working the following week. Shania, who worked at a large grocery store, had a difficult time finding providers who could meet her scheduling needs: She notes: “A lot of places, they’ll only watch kids—like some will watch kids on weekends, some will watch them only up until 6:00 at night, you know? So it’s really, really hard to find somewhere that is open weekends and late hours.” As a result, Shania moved her children to several different providers, trying to find someone she felt confident in and who could accommodate her schedule.

Ruby worked on a tree farm. She said the biggest challenge for her was the flexibility required of a child care worker. She said: “My hours are different every day. It can be a really long day sometimes, like in harvest time we go into the nighttime. So it [her child care provider] had to be somebody that was willing to keep over certain hours. A lot of the babysitters only do from 6-6...and sometimes harvest nights we don’t get done until 8 or 9pm. So it’s got to be somebody that was willing to do dinner and had no time limit, or because of working Saturdays, that would be available on the weekend in case I had to jam and couldn’t find someone for him [her son] to go visit.” Her babysitter, not a family member, picked her children up from school, kept them late, and provided care when the children were not in school.

Additionally, unpredictable hours made it harder to predict income week to week.

Abby and Ruby worked for employers who required them to call the night before to see if there would be work. Abby worked at a call center that demanded complete flexibility. She would have to call in the evening before to see if there was work for her the next day. Sometimes she was dismissed early if there wasn’t sufficient work. The grandparents of her youngest two children were paid through Employment Related Day Care to provide care for all the children.

Ariel had a consistent schedule of days, and a consistent start-time of 5am working at a grocery store, but she did not know when her shift would end—it could be any time between 11 am and 2pm. Further, she was often called to do weekend shifts. Ariel managed because her mother moved in with the family and was paid through ERDC to provide child care.

Finally, Athen was paid not by the hour but by the car in an auto detail business. She found that she lost hours over time: “When I start, I work 45 hours a week. But now I work sometimes 40, sometimes 30, 36, 35.” On slow days, her employer would either send her home early or call her and tell her not to come in at all. She estimated that in some months her income had reduced by one half, and she was struggling to pay her bills. She relied on family and friends to watch her children, sometimes for free, sometimes for \$10/day per child.

And for some, asking for more stable schedules resulted in firings or being forced out of their jobs.

When Joyce returned from maternity leave she was demoted because she could not accommodate a radical shift in her schedule from day shifts to evening shifts. Her employer did not consult with Joyce about the schedule change and was not willing to negotiate with her. She felt that the restaurant forced her out because she asked for a return to the predictable schedule she had before maternity leave.

Thank you listening to these stories.