



**SEIU Local 503 Testimony on HB 2547
April 6, 2015**

Chair Keny Guyer, members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. For the record, my name is Melissa Unger and I am the political director of SEIU Local 503. Today I am here to talk with you about HB 2547 and where we hope to take the conversation regarding housing with services.

SEIU represents many different members that work in long term care, from nursing homes, assisted living facilities and over 20,000 homecare workers that work for the Medicaid consumers. Our member care about the quality of services they provide, their jobs and the entire system of long-term care.

The Housing with Services LLC (HWS) is a pilot project supported by funding from the Affordable Care Act and other private funding sources. HWS officially launched in September 2014, and is serving 1,400 seniors and people with disabilities living in 11 publicly subsidized apartment buildings, located primarily in downtown Portland. HWS is also part of the Enterprise Community Partners Health and Housing Learning Collaborative that is currently supporting 8 projects that are in various stages of development.

These projects are serving seniors, families, and other special needs populations, all living in publicly subsidized, HUD housing. The focus of these projects is to promote housing stability, improve access to health and social services, improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs. SEIU supports all of these goals.

We brought forward this bill because we think that offering housing and separately offering wrap around health services in one facility is a new type of care and we were not getting traction at getting rules defined about the new setting.

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We, did approach DHS this past summer about what the right rules and regulations should exist, the first meeting of that task force happened in February and there have been two meetings. In neither of the meetings has there been a timeline or a process that will be followed to make sure that there are rules or regulations in place as these facilities come online.

So in the meantime, we felt that it was necessary to bring forward a bill that would help us start to answer important questions like:

- A definition of what is housing with services is and what it is not.
- What are the right safety regulations, like fire safety
- What are the right consumer protections for people that are both tenants and also a captive audience for services? How do you differentiate about your rights as a tenant and a consumer of services?
- How do we protect choice in a system where certain service providers are more readily available to people?
- How do we make sure that the long-term care ombudsman is a resource for people if they need it?
- And those are just some of the questions that need to be answered

This housing setting is different than other low-income housing. We have homecare workers that provide services to residents that rent there and in talking with Annie Smith, a homecare worker, it is clear that it is different than they current system for most Medicaid consumers. For instance, right now if you are a Medicaid consumer, you would get your assessment and get a certain number of hours for care based on what types of assistance you need. You would then find a homecare worker, you would either go to the homecare registry, choose someone you know and are comfortable with, get a recommendation from a friend, or use an agency that a case worker refers you to. Then you would employ that homecare worker and if it didn't work out you would get a new one, because the consumer is the employer of the homecare worker.

In the housing setting that is being offered, people come into a housing facility because they need and are offered low-income housing and all receive Medicaid services. Here they are offered a presentation of services and lunch and are given a choice if they want to take up the services offered; imagine a scenario similar to a time-share sales presentation. A consumer can definitely decide not to take the services offered, but they continue to get information and resources

offered to them on an ongoing basis. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but it a big change in the way that we offer services currently to low-income seniors and it should be evaluated. Right now these housing facilities and the services have completely different regulations and licensing and there has been no evaluation about what happens when they merge together into one complete package.

The bill that is originally drafted was based off similar regulations that were set up in Minnesota for facilities that offer services like this and it answers many of the questions we have proposed. Housing with service is something that is happening in other states so we decided to copy another state's rules and regulations on it.

Since we started the conversation, it is clear that we must have more time to answer many of the questions we have proposed. We believe that a taskforce or workgroup would be a fine way to proceed, assuming that there a clear number of participants, a clear timeline and that more facilities are not opened until we have answered the questions before us.

We do believe that the definition of housing with services should not be limited to just low-income housing that services Medicaid consumers, because it would be just as easy to set up a for-profit facility that does this as well. We are currently working on a definition that makes sure that we are narrowing the definition of housing with services is and how it is different than a retirement community, so we will likely need more revisions to the amendments as we clarify this definition.

Thank you for your time today on this, we do believe it is an important conversation.