



April 8, 2015

Chair Alissa Keny-Guyer
House Committee on Human Services and Housing
900 Court St. - State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the Committee:

My name is Rhonda Morgan. I work for the Department of Human Services in the Self Sufficiency Program as a Case manager. I am also the statewide president for the sub local of SEIU 503 that represents workers in DHS and OHA.

I'm here in support of HB3391 which would remove barriers to allow the Department of Human Services to obtain stalking or protective orders on behalf of workers who face this kind of threat as a result of the work that we do.

We worked closely with DHS and the Attorney General's office to get the bill right. You have a -2 amendment that we ask you to consider. HB 3391. We would also like to thank Rep. Paul Evans for bringing this important legislation forward.

Over the past several years, the agency has seen an increase in the both the number and the severity of the threats made against state workers. Whatever the root cause or contributing factors, the reality is very personal and it is faced on a daily basis by DHS employees who serve some of the most vulnerable people of our state.

Child Welfare workers are some of the workers at most risk for harassment and stalking. These workers are tasked with keeping children safe and, if necessary, removing them from harmful home environments.

These workers go into unsafe, emotionally charged situations, often without back up, to respond to reports of children in danger. They need to know that the agency is able to assist and support them should they need it as a result of the work they do.

While we felt the need was most pressing for our child welfare staff, we have also heard from staff in other departments who have faced similar threats, including the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor whose client became obsessive and started following her because she was the only one he felt he could communicate with.

Currently, if a worker is threatened with stalking or harassment as a result of the duties they perform through the course of their employment with

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DHS, the agency is able to and does take some steps to protect workers, but they are limited to what they can do. In extreme cases, additional steps are needed. Currently, the worker has to navigate the judicial system on their own, using their own time and personal resources to obtain legal assistance to protect themselves and their families. This is all at a time when they are feeling scared and vulnerable.

This bill would allow the agency to work through the Attorney General's Office to obtain protective orders on behalf of the employee.

What we envision is that after all other resources and procedures have been exhausted, the individual employee would work with their manager to have DHS request the Attorney General to take action on behalf of the employee.

This bill also contains a task force component which would look at the potential benefits of expanding this policy to other departments and agencies.

I want to share with you an example of one of the extreme cases I mention earlier. This is the story of a worker who wanted to be here today but was scheduled to be in court for one of the children she is working with. Twyla submitted more detailed written testimony for the committee to read.

Twyla is a Child Welfare worker at DHS. She lives in a small community near Eugene. She has had to spend the last 4 years living in fear because of the harassment and stalking of a client. Through the course of her work, Twyla removed a child from an unsafe home environment in 2011. Almost immediately, this person started making threats, including very detailed personal information.

This parent even went so far as to sit outside Twyla's home on one occasion. Due to the limitations on the DHS, Twyla had to navigate the court system on her own with no support in order to get a stalking order. She had to pay out of pocket for attorney fees and had to do all of the work on her own time. She was in a terrifying situation all due to the work that she does. It only makes sense that workers like Twyla get the support of her employer when faced with a situation like this.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I urge you to support HB 3391.