

Chair Steiner Hayward, Chair Rayfield, members of the committee:

My name is Alexandra Sergeeva. I am a Caseworker in Child Welfare for Oregon Department of Human Services and I am a member of SEIU Local 503. I am here today is to testify in support of the DHS budget, specifically Child Welfare.

There were others that wanted to be here today but could not afford to be away from work even for just a few hours. So I am here to speak for myself as well as my fellow union brothers and sisters at DHS – Child Welfare.

I would like to give you a sense of what my day looks like. Most days are spent in the field interviewing children, parents and other people involved in the child's life. My main goal is to assess a child's safety. I work with the family members and community partners to assist that family to improve their life circumstances and keep children safe. One some days I do all of these things, plus I write court reports, arrange parent, child and sibling visitations, and provide transportation to children. I spend whatever time I have left trying to get caught up on overdue assessments.

In my office, every 3 days, a worker gets what is called an IR, which means it is an immediate response case. When you get an IR, you drop everything you are doing and you address this case. Workers also get 5-day response cases, which are slightly less urgent but still another case that must be worked into your current caseload. In my office, caseworkers get 2-3 new cases every week. Some months we are busier getting 2-3 cases a day.

10 cases is a manageable caseload. 15 cases get more difficult to manage. 18 cases are too many cases for one caseworker. (Add in here how many you currently have and/or if you have recently been close to 18). And this is how many cases I had in march.

In my office, we are short on permanency workers and SSA's. So that means we have to make adjustments to get the work done. CPS workers are carrying court cases longer and doing case work and supporting parents,

facilitating visits between parents, children and siblings, but we don't have capacity to do at the extent needed. 2 visits a month for siblings is not enough. This is simply not sustainable.

There are not enough hours in the day to do the work. It is a constant feeling of barely keeping my head above water, knowing at any moment I am going to go under. We are exhausted and overwhelmed. There are days I feel dizzy because I worked through breaks and lunch. The impact is clear and significant. We become impatient with our clients at a time in their life when they need more patience, not less. And it is naïve to think that this kind of exhaustion doesn't impact our ability to make decisions.

Child welfare workers came together over the last several months sharing their stories and experiences. In early February, we released a paper called *Oregon's Child Welfare System: Rebuilding the Home*. We wanted to add our voices to the conversation and to be a part of the solutions needed to fix the child welfare system in Oregon. We also think that it is vital that we amplify the voices of those most impacted by the child welfare system – the foster youth and foster parents.

We have three main budget asks of this committee for this budget cycle. We believe these three areas of investment will go a long way towards moving DHS Child Welfare forward:

- We would like to see investments made in staffing at DHS child welfare to 100% of the caseload model and a focus on recruiting and retaining high quality staff at CW. Most of you have heard in testimony by the agency that staffing at most DHS CW offices is well below the currently approved funding of 86.5%.
- We would like to see an increase in rates to foster parents and BRS placements to help recruit and retain high quality placements. The system cannot be fixed without more high quality placements for children.
- Lastly, we would like to see funding to support legal representation by DOJ for caseworkers during legal proceedings.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am happy to answer any questions.