

Testimony from Brian Rudiger, Executive Director SEIU Local 503

Chairs Hass and Barnhart, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. For the record, my name is Brian Rudiger, and I am executive director of SEIU Local 503, a union of 55,000 Oregonians who provide a variety of public services in our state. SEIU members maintain our roads, they care for seniors and people with disabilities, they protect children from abuse and addiction, and maintain our state parks. The diversity of demographics, race, religion, economic position, and geography within our union -- together with the fact that revenue touches all their lives so profoundly -- speaks to the universal importance of the work this committee is doing.

Today I want to share two stories to explain why revenue is so important to us.

First, I want to share the challenges our members face everyday in protecting the most vulnerable children in our state. None of us need any convincing about the challenges facing Oregon's child welfare system. Understaffing, high turnover, and a lack of placement options have collided with a growing demand for services to create a real crisis. Our workers feel helpless, frustrated and deeply afraid that they cannot meet the needs of the children in their care. Without significant funding increases, we will not solve these problems. In fact, with the cuts to public employee compensation under consideration, we could make the staffing problem even worse.

Second, I want to tell you about the 20,000 low-wage homecare workers in Oregon that are members of SEIU 503. Throughout the state, this workforce of mainly women provides life-saving services to seniors and people with disabilities. These workers, who often live on the edge of poverty, are facing hours cuts in the current budget -- cuts that will force them to decide between paying their bills or putting food on the table.

These are just two stories, but their are countless more.

These vital services, and the people who provide them, are at risk because Oregon consistently ranks at the bottom of the country on corporate taxes. We applaud the work that has been done on the corporate activities tax -- and we believe this is the right structure to solve the problem. However, we worry that the proposal before the committee simply isn't enough. I would urge the members of this committee to do everything they can to push for game-changing revenue that will not just close the deficit, but create opportunities for new investments in our state's schools and essential public services like child welfare and in-home care.

Thank you.