

To:

House Committee on Business and Labor

Chair Holvey, Vice Chair Barreto, Vice-Chair Bynum, members of the committee

C/o. SEIU President Demarest

From: Rose M.Z. Freeby

Thank you for an opportunity to provide information and for your time and assistance . I am working through the Union and pursuant to my Employer's ( the Oregon Employment Department) rules I offer this information as a private citizen and do not speak for the employer . Mr. Demarest has my contact information.

I have been an Adjudicator at OED for almost ten years . I meet performance standards and take pride in my work. I enjoy the work and love my job . I feel like I make a difference , and am honored to be in a position help and serve people daily . The taxpayers have an investment in me and my training and experience and I take that investment seriously.

My husband Jesse Freeby was injured assisting a police officer in 2004 . (It was in the news ). We have always been so grateful for all of the kindness we have encountered on his journey . I am immensely appreciative to be able to give back by doing this work and making a difference helping the people of Oregon who employ me. I have repeatedly requested telework telecommute and met with outright refusal and seemingly pretextual reasons by OED . The failure to comply with the ORS teleworking statutes, its own policies and the Governor's directives seems like a failure to the people of Oregon . It seems like the agency is not fulfilling its own mission statement. The news is quite heartbreaking. People need the Unemployment system to function correctly and quickly in times of hardship. In this time of financial uncertainty the ability to move away from brick and mortar buildings and leases and use all workforce personnel remotely saves money and uses resources wisely . Washington State has successfully implemented this model with its state workers . The call centers risk a covid outbreak and business interruption . Almost every business we have worked with over these weeks and many state agencies are agile and able to accomplish remote work .

When the pandemic started I have been away from the call centers because of my husband's situation and the Governor's directive .If OED had a viable business continuity plan with remote working ,I could ( and have repeatedly offered) both assist the public, keep my family needs met, and meet the Governor's pandemic directives . I tried to go back and made it two days this week. The call center set up was chaotic and did not feel safe or functional. I would be asked questions about the Federal funds and access and the systems were not in place to direct claimants who had been waiting weeks for benefits to . The answer I had to give was to keep checking the website. The system seems broken and you have the power to address this to the benefit of all. The call center this week did not instill a feeling of safety in me (the whole set up induced panic) . There is lots of furniture moving and people touching things and there was just not a safe feeling. Mask usage was minimal and the spaces shared and close. I heard on the news covid had been in a call center. (My work did not tell me) – I lack confidence if I am exposed that I will be timely told and that I am safe while working in a high droplet environment . I hope this helps because I Love my job and co workers and want all to function well and be safe. I just want to be able to work and be efficient in a safe and productive and well run department .

I am experienced and hard working . My husband and I are so appreciative of everyone who is working together as a team to keep people safe ! I want to be contributing . I also have almost exhausted myself due to covid but my husband's situation continues . This will be true for the citizens who stayed home as

directed and cared for the elderly, infirm, or school children. As the work place gets going again these segments will still occasionally be ill, or need medical treatment . With exhausted OFLA, the workers you have invested in have no job protection to care for their loved ones for the balance of 2020 and maintain employment and medical coverage. An OFLA extension or return of COVID utilized OFLA hours would help.

My suggestions :

1. Future: Can the legislature require all future modernization project funding to require viable teleworking telecommuting components And cost savings analysis?
2. Can the legislature direct OED to immediately implement remote working opportunities and utilize all of its available and trained employees . This returns to Oregon its investment in the experience these employees bring and increases diversity and inclusion. This also uses your available and talented work force.
3. Can the legislature expand OFLA to provide an additional 10 to 12 weeks of unpaid expanded Oregon family and medical leave where an employee is unable to work due to reasons related to COVID-19. And/ or return to leave balances the ofla hours exhausted for covid after the Governor's initial order up to this amount ( 12 weeks ). This would also be consistent with the concepts behind the leave plans being implemented for the State with Mr Gerstenfeld at the helm. It would value families, the work force, and be an appropriate pandemic response.
4. Whether accountability needs to be implemented with this agency ? Should more appropriate business choices be made? -

Covid has a prediction of resurgence until an effective vaccine can be implemented . OfLa and FMLA protected leave balances are being exhausted. The situation creates fear , anxiety , worry, and a category of otherwise protected workers who complement your diversity and inclusion endeavors are excluded -These workers , often senior experienced employees who add value , and empathy - , encounter worries about what happens when they exhaust leave and have their jobs at risk and the protected people and children they care for placed at grave risk . The worries include the risk of losing medical coverage And placing vulnerable populations at further risk .

In terms of the agencies mission and stated values of the agency and the state of Oregon d diversity , inclusion, and retention of workers who add to the work place , how does employers decision to intractably wed itself to a brick and mortar model and the acquisition of work tools that fail to allow secure telework remote options fit? The statements made in the das lru appeals never explore what needs to occur and the cost for secure remote telework and recorded calls( if that really is an Issue given the voicemail And email options ).

The employers position is not in compliance with statute, stated values, governor orders ,ethics, and sound business management . In reality the private sector and multiple state agencies have the ability and have already implemented it . They have demonstrated agility and responsiveness .. This agency clearly had it and people were remotely working .

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/17/covid-19-makes-the-benefits-of-telework-obvious/>

Please review the OED appropriations requests to the legislature when it has been failing to utilize significant federal funds for modernization for over a decade .

Thank you for your consideration of these issues and your time and the opportunity to provide input .  
Together we can make things improve!

Rose M. Z Freeby

Private citizen