

Chairs Nosse and Beyer and members of the committee:

For the record my name is Andrea Kennedy-Smith, and I am a member and state-wide Vice President for the Public Sector of SEIU Local 503. I am a Paralegal at the Department of Human Services Child Welfare in Hillsboro, and I have been in my position for nearly 12 years.

DHS has had decades of instability, unmanageable continuously increasing caseloads, limited budgets, and consistently being understaffed. In addition, duties continue to be added to the ever-growing list. We have permanency caseworkers (SSS1's) carrying 30-40 children on their caseloads when it should be 11.5 cases according to the workload model. We have protective service workers (SSS1's) getting 20 cases assigned to them a month when it should be 6.85 according to the workload model. The workload model desperately needs to be updated and needs to be calculated by a reasonable number of children on a caseload not the number of cases.

We do not have enough Social Service Assistants to provide transportation and supervision for family visits. Our turnover will continue to be an issue until our caseloads are capped to a realistic number. Paralegals are stretched thin as well providing support to clients, caseworkers, supervisors and the Dept. of Justice. We have 2 full time Paralegal positions to serve Washington County and it is not enough. Paralegals are overwhelmed by increasing workloads around the State. Our workloads continue to increase without any prudent evaluation for adding additional Paralegals to properly support the branches and the communities we serve. According to the Secretary of State's audit last year, DHS is understaffed by 117 Paralegals. Giving staff impossible workloads is a setup for failure and a disservice to the community and vulnerable children we serve.

Escalating workloads continue to stretch staff thin and we have had countless employees go out on FMLA over the years due to work related mental health issues related to stress, anxiety, PTSD, and vicarious trauma. Self-care during work hours is non-existent and this job negatively affects self-care opportunities after work due to exhaustion and taking work home. Work/life balance and self-care should be a top priority for the State to safeguard morale and retention. We are not surviving in this system any longer. We cannot continue to keep this ship afloat. We are all sinking aboard the Titanic.

The work that my colleagues and I do is important to us as well as the communities we serve, and it is a critical part of Oregon's ability to protect children and give families the services they need to stay together. I am asking that you fund DHS 100% to achieve the workload model.