

Chairs Nosse and Beyer, members of the committee,

For the record my name is Rosanne Scott, and I am an SEIU 503 member. I am a permanency caseworker in Child Welfare in Portland at the Midtown office. I love my job, and I have done this work for almost 18 years because kids living in foster care really need someone to plan for their future. That someone is me but sadly I don't have enough time for each individual child to give them the attention and effort on their behalf that they desperately need. I am writing to you today to ask you to fully fund Child Welfare so we can be staffed at 100% instead of the shockingly low level of staffing we currently maintain. I've been doing this work for almost 18 years and over time it has grown more and more complex and difficult. It is harder and harder to attract and keep caseworkers in this job because of the extremely heavy workload and the emotional toll the work takes on you when an undoable workload prevents you from adequately serving your kids and families.

Caseworkers are responsible for hugely momentous things like getting to know the children and their biological parents to determine what the family needs to be reunited. The caseworker is responsible for understanding the child's needs and supporting them at key moments in their life such as their first day in foster care/being separated from their family, helping their biological family with repair work so the child can return home, or introducing them to their adoptive family and structuring the transition to maximize the potential for success. All of this takes time, and my caseload is almost double what the Secretary of State's Audit says it should be, so I have 40 hours a week to do 80+ hours of work. It is difficult to impossible to do a good job at anything when you are so short on time to give to any one task. The consequences of not being able to show up for your kids, biological parents, and foster families are devastating. As caseworkers, the things we are responsible for are truly life-altering for the people we serve and it is simply unacceptable that we don't have enough time to do our jobs properly.

The personal toll it takes on caseworkers is huge too. Caseworkers develop anxiety, depression, and physical health issues due to the high stress of the workload and not being able to take care of themselves as they do this incredibly demanding and important job. Frequently I do not have enough time in my day to take breaks, eat lunch without also simultaneously working, or use the bathroom. I often work late to try to catch up, sometimes putting in 12-15 hour days in an effort to stay on top of an impossible workload. In the last 15 days I have had one day off where I didn't do any work at all. That is really hard on me personally and affects my ability to have any kind of work-life balance. I feel like I'm being buried in a mountain of work and each task is so important because it truly affects someone's life, yet I am simply not able to do all of the things that my kids need me to do.

The kids and families in our system have this opportunity to make positive changes but they need our help, otherwise they wouldn't be involved with Child Welfare. The window of opportunity to help our kids gets narrower as time passes and we don't have any time to waste. Repeated exposure to trauma has a cumulative negative effect on children's development and it is our job to minimize or stop this cycle. Our kids and families deserve an available, attentive and focused caseworker. Adequate staffing is the only way to provide our families with this. If our program had the funding it needed, so many wonderful things would happen. Kids would not linger in foster care because their caseworker would have the time available to focus on the child and family and do all of the work required to help them exit the system. Kids would be living with their permanent family as soon as possible rather than waiting while I try to carve out time to get to their case. Biological parents would have increased chances of having their child returned to them because they would have the support from the Agency they need to make

positive changes. Oregon would start passing federal audits instead of failing them. We would retain quality staff who have the experience and passion to do this work well instead of brand new caseworkers who are barely scraping by, then quitting in despair. We would consistently see good outcomes for kids rather than tragic news stories about all the ways Oregon's Child Welfare system is failing our children.

I suspect many if not most of you don't know the sheer amount of work it takes to have a child successfully leave the foster care system. Returning a child to a parent is a wonderful thing but takes a huge amount time and effort. It takes relationship building, connections to many service providers and careful monitoring. This is the best case scenario for kids who are in foster care. If that is unable to safely occur, I am responsible for making another permanent plan for where the child will live and grow up. This also takes an extraordinary amount of work – looking into all interested relatives (and foster parent under certain circumstances), preparing the child for the transition, working with the birth and foster parents to support them during this process, recruiting for a general applicant adoptive family if needed, spending hours and hours reading adoption homestudies, doing all the required paperwork and processes to select an adoptive family, then actually transitioning the child and supporting the child and adoptive family once the child has moved in. And once the child is placed with their permanent family there is still a very large amount of work that needs to be done so that they can exit DHS custody. A major reason adoptions take so long in Oregon is because caseworkers do not have the time to do all of the related tasks in a timely manner.

Each child and family needs and deserves my best attention during these pivotal moments in their lives and it can have devastating consequences when I am not available due to understaffing and high workload. It sounds dramatic but it is absolutely true that people's lives are on the line in my work. As an agency and state we need to do better for these kids who are depending on us. Adequate funding to staff our agency at 100% is vitally important. Permanency caseworkers need to be responsible for no more than 11-12 kids, not the 20-25 or more that is the current average caseload.

Thank you for your time, and for your commitment to this issue.

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