



## Service Employees International Union Local 503

*72,000 public services workers, care providers, and non-profit employees in Oregon.*

**To:** Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

**On:** February 24, 2021

**Re:** House Bill 5039, Oregon Youth Authority Budget

Dear Co-Chairs Gorsek and Sollman, members of the Committee,

My name is Courtney Graham, and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of SEIU Local 503. SEIU represents more than 72,000 workers in the state of Oregon, including more than 22,000 state workers such as those at the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA). As the Agency's primary labor partner, we are happy to provide testimony in support of OYA's budget.

Members of SEIU's Sub-Local 415, which represents 750 or so employees who work at Oregon Youth Authority facilities throughout the state, have also submitted testimony for the record which I encourage you to read. There are a handful of key areas that I would like to lift up in OYA's 2021-2023 budget.

The Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations (OIIR) at OYA is critical to supporting youth of color and LGBTQIA+ youth in facilities throughout the state. By continuing funding for critical programs through the OIIR, our state affirms that those youth deserve culturally appropriate, compassionate care that will improve outcomes and support them as they transition back into the community.

The Governor's Budget also continues to allow OYA to retain critical staff, even as the youth population declines, in order to achieve OYA's goal of "Small and Safe Living Units." Not only is allowing OYA to continue to reduce staff to youth ratios over time critical to achieving compliance with the PREA, but it will also allow for more individualized case management, increase safety, and generally align OYA staff ratios with best practices across the country.

One investment that was not made by the Governor's Budget, but that we encourage the committee to reconsider, is Policy Option Package (POP) 101 from the Agency's Requested Budget. This small package would have given OYA position authority for two permanent Behavioral Health Specialists at MacLaren, in order to avoid using double fills or temporary help. Currently, the ratio of mental health professionals to youth is 1 to 25, which is the minimum staffing level to prevent suicide, and has been in place for over 25 years. Much has changed in the world and in our understanding of the critical role mental health can play in youth development, our practices at OYA should change, too. We hope the committee will consider including this POP in HB 5039.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of our members at OYA.

Sincerely,

Courtney Graham  
Political Strategist  
SEIU Local 503, OPEU