



Service Employees International Union Local 503

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

To: Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health, and Recovery
Re: Senate Bill 1556
On: February 3, 2022

Senator Gelser Blouin, Vice-Chair Robinson, and members of the committee.

For the record, my name is Alice Longley Miller and I work for SEIU Local 503 as a long term care policy strategist. I am here today to testify in favor of Senate Bill 1556, which creates a certification and public registry for caregivers.

SEIU Local 503 represents thousands of caregivers who work in home and community-based services. The central mission of our Union is to uplift the caregiving profession and create good jobs with potential for growth while ensuring excellent care for seniors and people with disabilities. We have consistently advocated for improvements to training, increased accountability, and increased access for consumers.

Senate Bill 1556 does two important things to improve quality of care and elevate the critical work caregivers do to support Oregon's seniors and people with disabilities. First, the bill uses existing caregiver training and background check requirements to create a certification for homecare workers and workers in some facilities, specifically memory care, residential care, and assisted living settings. This bill does not create any new training requirements for workers in these settings. Second, this bill creates a public-facing registry for caregivers. The registry will reflect the certification status of workers based on existing training and background check requirements, and it will be publicly available. This registry will be useful to caregivers, people receiving care and their family members, potential employers, and more.

This bill is critical at this moment because this industry is facing an unprecedented workforce crisis. Data shows that there are thousands of vacant direct care staff positions, even as there is increasing demand for these workers. The industry struggles with high turnover, difficulty recruiting, and challenges with retention, and COVID-19 has made the existing crisis in staffing even worse. Research consistently shows that one of the ways to address the workforce shortage in caregiving is to create career pathways and increase opportunities for professional development. We believe that creating this certification and the accompanying registry are two important strategies to make a caregiving career ladder a reality. Other strategies include raising wages, improving training, and standardizing training competencies across care professions. Our union is actively working on each of these strategies, among others.

SB 1556 complements other workforce development efforts we support this session, as well as investments the Legislature made in workforce in 2021. For example, as part of a package of investments in long term care, the legislature allocated \$12 million to ODHS for workforce development and directed the Agency to identify strategies to improve career pathways, among other things. Investments like this one were intended to support a certification and registry, as well as the future intent to develop a career ladder that connects to other healthcare careers. In addition, SEIU is very supportive of Senate Bill 1545, Future Ready Oregon. This bill will invest considerable resources in the

development of career pathways, including creating stackable and transferable credentials and SB 1556 is a critical first step to make this a reality. Creating a certification will give caregivers both confidence in their skills and expertise as well as an opportunity to build toward future advancement opportunities. We have heard consistently from workers that a certification would support them in demonstrating their skills and increasing the portability of their skills and training.

On the topic of training and portability, Senate Bill 1556 builds on training requirements implemented after the passage of another important bill, Senate Bill 669. SB 669 aligned training requirements between private agency home care and homecare through the homecare commission. This was a top SEIU priority bill in 2019, and we are glad that it passed. We believe that SB 1669 builds on this concept by defining those training requirements as a certification, thereby improving the portability of training, and giving workers an opportunity to transfer their skills between agencies and settings.

In our research, we found several other states that have created similar registries for these workers. For example, the Wisconsin registry includes details about completed training like instructor, training date, and current certification status.

We acknowledge that existing training is not perfect. As multiple caregivers have shared, there are gaps in existing training, a lack of enforcement and accountability, and varying degrees of quality. We believe that creating a certification will enable Oregon to develop a roadmap of improvements to existing training requirements, in addition to increasing the visibility of caregiver training and creating an infrastructure to expand on existing requirements. The bill phases in certification for homecare workers and in-home care agency (IHCA) workers by December 31, 2023; the Legislature has already adopted a policy aligning the training requirements for these workers in SB 669. The bill phases in a certification for workers in community-based care (CBC) facilities by December 31, 2024, giving the agency, advocates, employers, and the Legislature ample time to identify necessary training improvements and make adjustments to align with the new certification. SEIU looks forward to engaging in this work with a goal of establishing a consistent training standard and curriculum across all CBCs.

I would also like to address concerns about privacy relating to the public nature of the registry. Importantly, the bill has opt out provisions for family caregivers, survivors of domestic violence, and a more general opt out version for anyone who has a safety need for privacy. If a person opts out of the registry and the person receiving care has concerns about the certification status of a caregiver, they could request that from the worker or their employer. Because of the clear benefits to workers and the limited amount of personal information in the registry, we do not expect the opt out provision to be widely used.

There is currently a -1 amendment on OLIS, and there is a -2 that will be coming shortly. The intent of the -2 amendment is to address two additional issues that have been identified: a technical fix to section 1 requested by the Agency, and removal of the permissive fee language. With regard to the technical fix, through routine review the Agency determined that Section 1(2)(a)(C) needed to be slightly adjusted to reflect current background check requirements in ORS 443.004, to ensure we are not unintentionally changing these requirements. With regard to the fee language, we are aware that stakeholders are concerned about the burden of an additional fee and believe

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that the ongoing maintenance costs for the registry and certification will be relatively minor, eliminating the need for a fee.

The bottom line is that the workforce crisis in long term care is only going to continue to worsen unless our state takes action now to stabilize the workforce. Workers need to see that the work they do is valued and that they have opportunities to build on their skills and advance in their career. At the same time, families are losing confidence in the quality of care they and their loved ones are receiving, and they deserve the transparency and peace of mind that will come with a public registry. Senate Bill 1556 is one critical step Oregon can take right now to professionalize caregiving and establish clear career advancement opportunities for caregivers, and we urge your support.

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