



Service Employees International Union Local 503

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

To: Senate Committee on Education

On: May 9th, 2023

Re: House Bill 3227

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is David Ramos and I am a Political Strategist with SEIU Local 503. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our organization's position regarding HB 3227. SEIU represents classified employees at Portland Public Schools (PPS) – 60% of whom are custodial workers.

The workers we represent have a long history with the underlying Civil Service Law which House Bill 3227 seeks to change. Nearly 20 years ago, it was the Court's interpretation of this law which saved members from losing their jobs when the District attempted to lay them off. It's for this reason that we are engaging in this conversation and why we as a union have to weigh each change to the law carefully. I've outlined each of the changes in bold and provided a bit of context as well as insight into our stance on the changes thereafter.

1. **Removal of the requirement that candidates for appointment to the civil service board be electors of the corresponding school district and reside within the school district boundaries for at least five years immediately preceding their appointment to the board.** This change was proposed by PPS because they were observing challenges with filling vacancies on the Custodial Civil Service Board. We would have preferred a 50-mile residency requirement but ultimately testified in support of this part of the bill.
2. **Increasing the population threshold for qualification of the Custodial Civil Service Law from 300,000 to 475,000.** This change was proposed to prevent the law from applying to other large school districts in our state whose populations were inching toward the current threshold of 300,000. Since our focus here is our members at PPS and this threshold does not impact PPS' qualification, we were **supportive** of this change
3. **A shift from the use of examinations toward the use of assessments in the hiring process for custodians.** This change was proposed by PPS because they believed that the examination was serving as a barrier to filling the vacancies in custodial positions and that examinations were also having a disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities and individuals with disabilities.

As a labor union, we understand the importance of ensuring that workplaces are fully staffed both from the perspective of ensuring quality employment opportunities *and* for the health and safety of staff and students across these

schools. This is why we advocated for a 15% pay increase for all custodial staff during our last contract bargaining sessions – because our members believed that the staffing crisis was being exacerbated by lagging wages. Once the pay raise was negotiated, our members perceived that a majority of the custodial vacancies were filled and the remainder are on track to being filled – even with the examination still in place.

Equity is an incredibly important issue to our organization. We are proud to be one of the most diverse labor unions in the state, with an overwhelming majority of our members being women, BIPOC individuals, and from low-income households – many of whom serve individuals with various disabilities. The issue of uplifting and empowering historically marginalized communities is one we take very seriously.

That said, as far as we know, observations of equity disparities in the hiring process are based on speculation and are not supported by concrete data. Furthermore, it is important to note that an examination assessing an individual's suitability for the job is incredibly important when we are talking about positions that do more than simply clean. Custodians handle various chemicals, maintain the school's functioning, and most importantly keep both teachers and students safe both on a daily basis *and* in emergent situations. These are not responsibilities that should be taken lightly, and we believe it is important that individuals tasked with them should be examined sufficiently. We also do not believe there is anything in the current law that wouldn't allow for the District to propose changes, such as offering the exam in languages other than English. That said, our organization was able to get to a place of **neutrality** on this part of the bill as it is our understanding that PPS is providing candidates with comprehensive training opportunities that help bridge these gaps.

All in all, we are **neutral** on this bill. We would strongly oppose further changes to the law. We do not necessarily *agree* with the changes the bill already makes to the Custodial Civil Service Law, but we understand the underlying motivation behind the changes proposed – even if we believe there are better alternatives to addressing the issues at hand; and we will continue to work directly with PPS to ensure both a quality workplace for our members *and* a safe and healthy learning environment for the students in these communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

David Ramos
Political & Policy Strategist
SEIU Local 503, OPEU