

February 3, 2021

RE: House Bill 5007

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Beyer and Representative Gomberg, members of the committee,

My name is Austin Fohnagy, I am a Business and Employment Specialist with the Oregon Employment Department (OED). Although I don't represent my agency with my written testimony. As a member leader with SEIU 503 and citizen, I want to speak to you about frontline workers in the Oregon Employment Department and the Budget.

The staff at OED worked hard to serve Oregonians and Businesses. The staff were tasked with the work to start new programs from scratch, process claims and payments to Oregonians in need. All of this while working through a pandemic. These are front line workers who took on a mountain of a challenges and still work hard in a telework capacity today.

Business and Employment Specialist is a unique position with the state. Not only do they process UI claims but provide employment and business services; trade act services (for workers impacted by foreign trade), disaster benefits (Oregonians impacted by wildfires); but also fight against UI fraud and overpayments. All of these programs including the new Paid Family Leave Programs are a safety net and a launch pad for Oregonians economic welfare. As a bargaining delegate with my union, I can say this classification is the backbone of our agency, and these workers are under classified in their salary range. Please take note of that.

This budget will support the agency in modernization and to better adapt with new programs. But please remember the people who work in the agency. These are the people who helped our economy, during good times and bad. 2020 was hard for Oregonians, and we still have a recovery ahead of us in 2021. I believe the workers at OED will help make that recovery possible for our people in our state. It can be done with your help and passage of this budget for these vital services, thank you.

Sincerely,

Austin Fohnagy