

Oregon Ways and Means Roadshow  
Written Testimony-District 4  
Jolene White-Homecare worker and SEIU member

I am a homecare worker in Grants Pass, working through Oregon's consumer employee program. Homecare workers and personal support workers are called heroes. At least those who count on us day in and day out think so. Dedication, personal sacrifice and going above and beyond have taken on new meaning since the pandemic hit, and more so with natural disasters striking.

The caregiving industry has become fragile and inadequate. When our workers needed PPE and needed guidance and answers, our union was there. When our workers were in need of help due to illness, family responsibility or being impacted by the fires or freeze, SEIU was there. As appreciative as we are for this, it highlights a failure on the part of our state government. Inadequacies in planning, in funding and in administration have occurred. On a state level, provisions should be made for vulnerable members of our population, and in turn, for those who step up to care for them.

President Biden wants to build infrastructure. Investing in homecare and personal support work is part of that infrastructure he intends to build up. We need pay that beats inflation and rising housing costs, better benefits, appropriate training and career development. In this industry we need enticement to expand our workforce, longevity in a solid career and structure that decreases employee turnover.

American Rescue Plan federal money will provide Oregon with funds to reinforce and expand long-term care programs--programs for which there will be an ever-growing need. Investing in homecare and personal support workers will grow a strong and consistent workforce, achieving the goals the state programs exist to achieve. We attend to the physical, mental and emotional needs of vulnerable members of our population: our elderly and those with developmental disabilities.

The rainy day is here. Please designate federal funding to essential worker pay. This will put money in the pockets of front-line essential workers, as intended by the American Rescue Plan. Please also continue to support and improve state long-term care programs by allocating funds for better wages, benefits and workforce development. Investing today will generate good return tomorrow.