



Service Employees International Union Local 503

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

To: House Committee on Business and Labor

On: February 27th, 2023

Re: House Bill 3227

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Elmer and Sosa, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is David Ramos and I am a Political Strategist representing SEIU Local 503. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our organization's neutrality regarding HB 3227 this morning.

SEIU represents classified employees at Portland Public Schools – 60% of whom are custodial workers. Custodians and nutrition service workers form the backbone of our schools. They keep the lights on, keep classrooms clean, and keep our students warm and fed.

Section 1 of this bill amends ORS 242.340 to remove the requirements that candidate for 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. SEIU supports these changes. While we agree that a candidate for appointment to the civil service board should not have to reside within the school district, we would like to request that candidates reside within 50 miles of the school district headquarters. This request is to ensure that they are able to be meaningfully engaged within the community *and* be from the same community as those who they are serving.

The only other major change in the bill is a shift away from the use of “examinations” and toward the use of “assessments” as a part of the hiring process for new custodians. We understand that this proposal is an attempt to reduce barriers to filling employment vacancies within the district and to promote more equitable hiring practices.

We support the underlying motivation behind these changes, however, we disagree on the proposed solution. 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 session – because our members experienced first-hand the impacts of the staffing crisis the district was facing; and believed it was in large part because wages were lagging behind. Since obtaining this pay increase with the ratification of our last contract, our members have observed a reduction in vacancies and the remaining vacancies are on track to be filled.

All of this said, our members have some concerns about eliminating the examination requirement from the hiring process. They believe it lowers hiring standards unnecessarily, especially given the improvement in hiring rates by the district since the pay increase was negotiated.

We see eye-to-eye with Portland Public Schools on the importance of ensuring that these critical positions are filled for the sake of our students and making the process more equitable – but have different ideas of what changes should be implemented to achieve this. That said, we are working with the district to find a mutually agreeable solution to issues that this bill brings into question; and look forward to coming back to the committee at a later date with proposed amendments that all stakeholders in the district can be content with.

Thank you for your time and consideration.