



To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

From: Andrea Kennedy-Smith

Date: 3/19/2025

RE: Support for SB 5526 POP 109 Personnel Safety

Dear Co-Chairs Valderrama and Campos, and members of the committee,

My name is Andrea Kennedy-Smith and I've been a Paralegal at the Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Program for the last 18 years. I am a member of SEIU Local 503 and am the President of Local 200 for ODHS and OHA non institution employees.

I am writing in support of *ODHS SB 5526 POP 109* and asking you to make investments in public employees' safety that would improve office and worker safety. POP 109 would allocate funds for facility improvements and security and outreach contracts. Many of our leased buildings continue to be in disrepair. This is unacceptable. Data shows a 450% increase in threatening incidents at ODHS offices over the last five years. When will public employees' safety be a priority?

ODHS workers serve 1 in 3 Oregonians all around the state, from birth to late retirement services, and meet households where they are. While ODHS has innovated to make services more accessible, many Oregonians continue to rely on office settings to access services. The agency is struggling to maintain adequate, safe and secure working environments across its statewide operations.

While we try our best to deescalate situations, workers are often verbally threatened and physically assaulted while working. After a traumatic event at work, workers are expected to continue working serving clients. There needs to be a significant increase in support of the workforce as we continue to be exposed to trauma every day as part of our work.

**Employees continue filing incident reports through Workday, OSHA complaints, and grievances through our collective bargaining agreement. Our Trauma Aware department continues to be staffed with only 3 employees to serve 14,000 workers. Our Office of Health, Safety and Employee Well-Being department continues to be staffed with 3 employees to serve 14,000 workers. We continue to see a rise in suicides of state employees, and these departments are supposed to support employees through these devastating losses. When there is a death on our caseload,**

**whether it be a foster child, foster parent, or client, these two departments are supposed to provide support. These two departments continue to be severely and detrimentally understaffed and underfunded.**

Without the investment described in POP 109, office safety will persist as an issue and increase turnover and workplace complaints. Please write SB 5526 POP 109 into the budget to ensure that workers at least have a budget to work with to improve safety on the job.

Thank you for your time,

Andrea Kennedy-Smith