

Submitter: Steven Peterson  
 On Behalf Of:  
 Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
 Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Steven Peterson. I am a resident of Astoria. I have been an employee of ODHS for almost 18 years, through SSP (Self Sufficiency Programs) and now in OEP (Oregon Eligibility Program). I started as front desk support staff, and within two years promoted to eligibility work. During my first 5 or 6 years with the agency, my family of 4 was receiving SNAP benefits. This was with my wife also working a menial and minimum-wage job with long hours that made it necessary for our teenage daughter to provide childcare for our younger daughter. Since then, the Federal Poverty Index has grown at a rate that compares with - and in some years has outpaced - wage and compensation increases for state employees.

I have seen firsthand that Oregon employees who administer our social safety net are living at or near poverty levels and rely upon the same benefit programs for themselves. Many of my peers cannot afford to live in the area that we serve. I have coworkers across the district who are receiving SNAP and ERDC (Employment Related Day Care) benefits. I have coworkers across the district and in my local office who are in shared housing with parents, with roommates, and even with ex-partners. Most are living from paycheck to paycheck. The ODHS salary scales are below a living wage and are not keeping up with the Federal Poverty Index or with housing costs.

Please note the following numbers for 2025, taken from ODHS eligibility rules and from the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Clearinghouse:

*SNAP Categorical Eligibility (200% Federal Poverty Limit (FPL))*

Household Size	2	3	4
<b>200% FPL</b>	\$3,525	\$4,442	\$5,359

*LIHEAP Eligibility (60% of State Median Income (SMI))*

Household Size	2	3	4
<b>60% SMI</b>	\$4,011 (\$48,136/year)	\$4,955 (\$59,462/year)	\$6,569 (\$78,827/year)

And compare the above numbers with the salaries of the state workers who administer the SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid programs.

Our front desk support staff, or Human Service Specialist 1, are at Salary Range (SR) 15. This salary range is truncated and starts at Step 3.

- SR 15, Step 4 is \$3,553. For a household of 2, this is only \$28 more than the SNAP Categorical Eligibility limit, and well within the LIHEAP assistance guidelines.
- SR 15, Step 9 is \$4,409. This is within the SNAP income guidelines for a 3-person household.
- SR 15, Step 10 is \$4,622. This is the highest salary step for our support staff and is still within the LIHEAP guidelines for a 3-person household.

Our eligibility staff, or Human Service Specialist 3, are at Salary Range 19. This salary range is also truncated and starts at step 3. Because of high turnover and low retention rates, over half of our eligibility staff at this time have been employed for two years or less and are at Step 5 or below. These low wages are one of the factors in the low retention rate.

- SR 19, Step 5 is \$4,409. This is within the SNAP income guidelines for a 3-person household.
- SR 19, Step 9 is \$5,325. This is within the SNAP income guidelines for a 4-person household.
- SR 19, Step 10 is \$5,575. This is the highest salary step for our eligibility staff and is still within the LIHEAP guidelines for a 4-person household.

To work with and support our eligibility staff, we have lead workers, or Human Service Specialist 4, at Salary Range 22.

- SR 22, Step 2 is \$4,409. This is within the SNAP income guidelines for a 3-person household.
- SR 22, Step 6 is \$5,325. This is within the SNAP income guidelines for a 4-person household.
- SR 22, Step 10 is \$6,420. This is the highest salary step for our lead workers and is still within the LIHEAP guidelines for a 4-person household.

The above salary numbers show that the state workers who determine eligibility for assistance programs such as SNAP, ERDC, TANF, and Medicaid are themselves low-income earners who in many cases qualify for the same benefits that they are administering. This contributes to high turnover and low retention rates, which in turn are factors in recent Quality Control error rates that have the potential to cost Oregon taxpayers money in the form of federal sanctions and fines. I would like to ask that you provide funding to increase ODHS employee salaries to a reasonable level. We serve low-income Oregonians, and can do so more effectively when we are lifted out of the low-income category.

I thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. I am available if you have questions or wish further clarification.

Steven Peterson