



To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

From: Anthony Castaneda, SEIU 503

Date: April 3, 2025

Re: SEIU testimony on ODHS HB 5526

Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Anthony Castaneda, and I am writing on behalf of SEIU Local 503 in support of the Governor's investments in the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) as described in HB 5526.

In addition to the general increase in the agency budget, SEIU 503 supports POPs: 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 109, 112, 113, 114, 201, and 560.

SEIU represents roughly 65,000 working people across the State of Oregon and over 4,000 in ODHS. More than three quarters of our members are impacted directly or indirectly by programs administered by ODHS. This includes the dedicated employees at the Department across all programs: child welfare, aging and people with disabilities, office of developmental disability services, vocational rehabilitation, the Oregon eligibility project, self-sufficiency, and central and shared services.

We also represent thousands of homecare and personal support workers under the Oregon Homecare Commission (OHCC), adult foster home (AFH) providers, thousands of frontline caregivers in skilled nursing facilities, residential care, assisted living, and memory care settings (LTC) Oregon, as well as direct support professionals in residential programs. This work is invaluable to our state, yet many of our members face daily challenges that impact the services they provide to Oregonians.

Workload:

Workloads across ODHS are unsustainable, and we need the Legislature to invest in staffing and reduce workloads in every program. If we do not do this, we will lose more staff. Manageable caseloads, personal safety, and workplace respect are essential for employee well-being and job satisfaction.

- Fund customer-focused staff (FTEs) across programs to reduce excessive caseloads.
- Support the implementation of new workload models across all ODHS programs, and fully fund the recommended staffing levels.

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Safety:

Our members across programs and settings report consistent safety concerns and are looking to the Legislature to invest in initiatives that keep them safe on the job. Whether it's more tools to support people in crisis, requiring safe staffing, or consistent emergency protocols, we need the ODHS budget to invest in safety for frontline workers.

- Support ODHS 5526 POP 109 to improve office and worker safety amid a significant rise in workplace threats over the past five years.
- Support increased resources for the Oregon Homecare Commission to ensure that homecare and personal support workers have real support when a safety risk emerges. From hazardous home conditions to medical emergencies without proper protections or support, our members often work without employer-provided safety infrastructure, adequate emergency protocols, or immediate backup. When we protect caregivers, we protect the vulnerable Oregonians who depend on them

Accountability & Oversight:

Increase staffing in program oversight and licensing across the department. Staff need to be trained and well-equipped to ensure that vulnerable Oregonians are safe and that providers are following the law while cracking down on Medicaid fraud when it happens.

- Support HB 5526 POPs 101 and 105, which would strengthen ODHS's oversight capabilities, especially in APD and ODDS, ensuring facility reviews within 120 days of licensing or ownership changes.
- Fund HB 5526 106: With 24 percent of its budget allocated to contracts serving thousands of Oregonians, contract oversight is a critical component of the Child Welfare Division's work. Through effective oversight, Child Welfare ensures high service quality, client safety and responsible stewardship of public funds.
- Support HB 5526 POPs 114 to support frontline staff and essential service systems.
- Support POP 560 to ensure that people with disabilities who need home- and community-based supports through Aging and People with Disabilities (APD) DON'T have to jump through excessive bureaucratic hoops because of a mental health condition or substance use disorder.
- Support HB 5526 POP 201, which would upgrade ODHS's outdated, 50+-year-old computer systems to improve service delivery.

Rate-Setting Disparities:

The way ODHS currently sets the rates it pays providers for services across programs is not consistent and creates inequities between settings. The Legislature should:

- Develop more consistent rate-setting methodologies across the Department that take into account actual spending, costs, and corporate profits.
- Implement detailed cost reporting and transparency.
- Implement the CMS Access Rule (HB 5526 POP 103) to ensure that rates are going to direct care worker compensation.
- Support House Bill 2560 to improve rates for APD Adult Foster Homes (AFH). AFH providers are stretched to their limits, working long hours without adequate compensation, drowning in paperwork, and lacking critical support resources, like training and administrative support. HB 2560 is a necessary lifeline for AFH APD providers, offering fairer rates and a more sustainable path forward. Without it, Oregon risks losing a vital care option, harming both providers and residents
- Support House Bill 3838 to implement a Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) workforce standards board.

We are urging the Legislature to support an ODHS budget that addresses these key issues of workload, safety, accountability, oversight, and rate-setting disparities.

Sincerely,

Anthony Castaneda

Policy and Political Strategist

SEIU Local 503