



To: Joint Subcommittee on Human Services

From: Silvia Butler

Date: April 2, 2025

RE: ODHS HB 5526

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

My name is Silvia Butler, and I am writing in support of the Governor's investment in the Oregon Eligibility Partnership (OEP) in the Department of Human Services. OEP provides medical, food, cash and childcare benefits to 1 in 3 Oregonians, from cradle to late retirement.

SEIU 503 supports the following POPs in HB 5526:

- POP 104 Federally Required Changes to Data Services Hub
- POP 108 SNAP Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP)
- POP 113 Central Abuse Management System (CAM) Maintenance and Operations (M&O) Support
- POP 201 Mainframe Modernization

In June of 2020, I started with the Oregon Department Human Services as a Human Services Specialist 1 where my primary role was to help schedule individuals for interviews update, contact information, explain notices, help start applications, and connect them to the appropriate resources or departments. After eight months, I quickly learned everything I needed to learn about my role. Through hard work and a strong desire to better serve my community instead of just transferring my callers, I became an eligibility worker or Humans Services Specialist 3.

Workers help Oregonians navigate a complex set of eligibility rules and regulations while meeting service delivery expectations of our federal partners. OEP also actively

collaborates with partners, community members, and sovereign Tribal communities to address operational impacts and identify opportunities to improve customer service.

As an eligibility worker, I work to ensure the Oregonians I serve understand their rights throughout the application process while understanding the program rules and policies. Every day I work on average 4-10 cases that are a combination of full applications, renewals, periodic reports, reported changes, general questions, verification of requested information, and connecting people with the correct department to get their needs taken care of.

Every day, I listen to stories from individuals who have loved ones that need LTC and are afraid they can't afford the services. I listen to stories from people who do not have stable housing and are trying to figure out how to get their next meal. I listen to stories of people who want to be part of the workforce but are unable to do so because they need adequate childcare, and I have to turn them away because there is a current waitlist. Every day I listen to stories of people who are grateful for the services we offer that offer them the ability to be on their path to self-sufficiency. I listen to stories of students that are trying to gain education to hopefully one day have a livable wage and ask for help with food. I listen to stories of mother's or caregivers who are overwhelmed with relieve that their children with disabilities can have a way to find support for their special needs. I listen to the fear that migrant parents have for the political climate paled by the fear of not being able to provide sustenance for their kids, not because they aren't willing to work but because laws are in place that prevent them from doing so without fear or abashment, even when they are not requesting the benefits for themselves, but their US born children.

While on the surface we help with Medicaid, SNAP, CASH, and ERDC, all programs actually have subset programs with their own set of rules, so it is my job to understand what programs a client is potentially eligible for to understand what rules apply to their case and explain that to them. It is also my job to explain how the programs interact with one another when a client has multiple programs on their cases. To be able to explain the rules and know how to enter the information, my role requires me to be knowledgeable on specific areas like self-employment and how to read tax returns for an accurate data collection during our interviews with the client and while verifying information with the documents received. I need to understand the complexities of different resources like trusts, annuities, liquid resources, real estate ownership, life insurance, burial plans, among other things. We need to know how Medicare and Social Security income impact a case which means understanding how they function with our programs. We need to have a deep understanding of veterans and the varied benefits they have or are entitled to (which we are frankly still short on trainings for). We need to understand how the Oregon

Healthcare system operates to be able to explain to clients how they can use their OHP coverage, what number to call and for what. This includes understanding how other insurances affect OHP (IE: employer insurances, FFM insurances, etc.). We need to understand what resources we can offer when our programs are not enough; and often they are not enough. We need to know how to be well-versed with different database systems to verify income and resources as much as we can to take care of our Oregonians at initial contact as much as possible. For LTC, we need to understand the differences between MAGISERV, Non-MAGISERV, and Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities so that we can clearly explain to clients what is needed and get them connected to the appropriate offices for their level of care assessments. We also need to be well-versed with various immigration statuses and how they are treated within each program, among other knowledges. Most importantly, we have to know how to show empathy and treat people with respect and dignity. I wish I could say it came naturally to many but it's a learned skill we need constant reminders of to not be jaded, meaning more refresher trainings.

When needed training is not available due to funding concerns, it makes us inadequate to provide correct eligibility determinations which becomes a waste of our human resource time and consequently cause the Oregonian's undue financial harm as they must pay benefits back or figure out how to get dire coverage back when they came to us at a very vulnerable point in their lives. This creates distrust with government entities. All of which could be avoided if we have funds that go into the training we receive, to be efficient and knowledgeable in all the programs we are supposed to help with which is more than just five. We also need the funds to open more monies for ERDC to uplift our community and enable people to be part of the workforce.

In summary, the Oregon Legislature has an opportunity to investment in services and staff to ensure that all Oregonians have access to critical services.

Thank you,

Silvia Butler

(She, Her, Ella) ([Why pronouns matter](#))

Mi Gente Chapter 3 Financial Treasurer/

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Human Services Specialist 3 - Eligibility Worker



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Service Equity*