

December 6, 2024

Dear IBEW Local 89 Bargaining Team,

I am writing to share my strong support for securing sufficient year-round staffing in the new contract. As a Chief of Staff in the Oregon Legislature, I know that staffing levels are not just a matter of managing workloads and job satisfaction. Understaffing is also a safety issue, as I unfortunately learned last year.

I woke up on September 29, 2023, the third day of Legislative Days, and began preparing to go to work. But something felt wrong—I felt dizzy and light-headed, my ears were ringing loudly, and there were spots in my vision that kept me from seeing clearly. My legs began to feel weak and unsteady, and I called out to my partner for help. Then my vision went black and I collapsed on the floor.

I was brought to the emergency department, where the doctor told me I had experienced syncope, which is the medical term for fainting. After tests ruled out other causes, the doctor determined it was likely a result of stress and dehydration. He asked me if I had been experiencing a lot of stress at work.

The two days leading up to this episode had certainly been intense work days for me—the Capitol is a very busy place during Legislative Days, and Chiefs of Staff constantly juggle many things at once. I accompanied my boss during stakeholder meetings, took notes, and made sure we remained on schedule for all our appointments. I tracked committee proceedings, worked with stakeholders to submit bill concepts for drafting, and met with other staff about upcoming legislation. In between all of these tasks, I also answered phone calls, replied to emails, and met with the large number of lobbyists, advocates, and constituents who came to our office to ask questions and share their perspectives on issues important to them.

It is the nature of legislative work that every issue is important, and many issues are time-sensitive and require urgent attention. This results in a fast-paced and high-intensity work environment where staff can become overwhelmed or burned out without adequate support. Our office did not have a Legislative Assistant on staff at the time, so managing this workload required me to be constantly juggling two, three, four, sometimes five tasks at once. I do not remember if I took lunch breaks, because during busy times like Legislative Days, it is common for staff to not take breaks.

I did not share all this with the doctor in the emergency department. I think I said something to the effect of, “Yes, work has been very busy lately.” But looking back, it is easy to see how this extreme workload could lead me to faint from stress and dehydration.

I want to make clear that I have a very good relationship with my boss, and that my boss is incredibly supportive of my health and well-being. My intent in sharing this story is not to cast blame on anyone, but to paint a picture of what a work day can look like for a Chief of Staff and

how this affected me on that particular day. I do not think my workload is unrepresentative of what other staff experience, especially during the interim when offices are often understaffed.

I chose to work at the Oregon State Capitol because I want to help people and solve problems in the community. I take pride in developing strong policies and helping constituents connect with the resources they need, and I know my colleagues do, too. But understaffing undermines our ability to do this work effectively and has negative impacts on our health and safety. Securing funds for a year-round, full-time Legislative Assistant in every legislative office would ensure we always have the support we need to do our jobs well, both during legislative sessions and in the interim.

I urge you to continue fighting for year-round Legislative Assistant positions in the new contract.