

April 30, 2025

Co-Chairs Gorsek and Smith,

My name is Emerson Hamlin, and I am writing to share my strong support for securing two year-round staff positions for each legislative office. I previously served as a state legislative staffer, and worked for two legislators.

For my first two sessions, I was a session staffer. I worked hard, was fascinated by the legislative process, and felt that I was meaningfully serving Oregonians. Even so, I was left at the end of the session trying to determine what my next step would be—a conundrum session staffers have faced, it seems, since time immemorial. Of course, when confronted with the end of session, most have to leave political work. It is not a matter of wanting to stay in the field, it is a shortage of open positions and a need to keep food on the table.

When we lose session staffers, it is after they have spent months learning the legislative process, developing relationships with advocates and stakeholders, and gaining policy knowledge. When they leave, their skills, experience, and talent leave with them. If there were year-round positions, these staff could continue to serve the state. They could, over time, continue to grow their expertise, allowing legislative work to move more smoothly and effectively.

In my last two sessions, I served as a chief of staff, and inevitably, there was too much work for me to do by myself. I found I could keep the office functioning, or I could take on significant policy work in areas of interest to my boss, but doing both was nearly impossible. My office finally hired an additional staffer specifically to develop housing policy, and even though we could only afford to employ her for 15 hours a week, she was a lifesaver. She allowed my office to meet constituent needs and bring forward policy solutions. Our entire legislative district was better served by having her.

Having two, year round legislative staff will improve the workload of existing staff, and ensure that legislative offices can best represent all their constituents.

Thank you for considering these comments,

Emerson Hamlin