

Wednesday, April 30th, 2025

Subject: HB 5016 - Support Funding for Two Full-Time & Year-Round Legislative Staff Positions

Dear Co-Chair Gorsek, Co-Chair Smith, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on General Government,

I am writing today in my personal capacity, as a former Chief of Staff, to express **strong support for the funding of two full-time and year-round legislative staff positions in each legislative office.**

Currently, legislative offices only have the budget to fund one full-time and year-round staffer (Chief of Staff or Legislative Director), with the addition of another full-time staffer during just the six-month and five-week regular sessions (Legislative Aide).

I've had the privilege of working for dedicated State Representatives in my capacity as a Chief of Staff, which means **the work does not end after session!** We continued to meet with other legislators, local elected officials, lobbyists, advocates, organizations, and constituents in the interim months to craft policy, oversee implementation of bills, and engage in local issues.

It was not uncommon for me to work 12+ hour days in the interim to try and meet the needs of our district. Given the nature of our work, **a missed email or phone call from a constituent could be the difference between them getting connected with services like unemployment insurance, veterans benefits, healthcare, or housing assistance.**

I was fortunate to be able to work with my boss to stretch our budget as much as possible to allow for our legislative aide to stay on longer after session or onboard them earlier before a session. **Legislative aides play key roles in a legislative office both during session and in the interim despite being temporary workers for six months or just FIVE WEEKS in a year. I would not have been successful as a Chief of Staff without the support and dedication of a legislative aide.**

The roles of legislative staff have also changed dramatically over the past several years, particularly in how constituents interact with their elected officials. Constituents expect more timely correspondence and up-to-date information **throughout the year.** And, our elected officials have more responsibilities, including analyzing and understanding a greater number of bills and policy issues. **Legislative aides are integral to this work of the Legislature.** They help conduct policy research, manage social media accounts, organize events, draft external communications and most importantly, engage with constituents.

In my time in the Legislature, I've had the joy of supervising three legislative aides, all of whom have gone on to higher positions in the Legislature or in external organizations (each to their own credit and hard work). One of my biggest concerns was - what if we had not been able to stretch our budget to onboard them an extra month prior to session, or keep them on the team longer after a session so they would have time to find another job? **What if we had lost their talent in local politics?**

The Oregon State Legislature has a staff retention problem, and a big part of that is the temporary nature of our jobs. **It is incredibly difficult to cultivate a pool of dedicated public servants without full-time and year-round positions.** Our constituents depend on us to deliver services and fix systems - they need us to care. **We cannot afford to lose public service-oriented individuals from government work because of limited job stability.**

I am acutely aware of the difficult budget situation the Oregon State Legislature finds itself this biennium. **But, I hope this Committee will consider the meaningful impact and dedication of your legislative staff in serving the people of this state alongside you.**

Please support the allocation of two full-time and year-round staff in each legislative office.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Medha Pulla