

Submitter:

Chris Stuckart

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On General Government

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB 5016

Co-chairs Gorsek and Smith and members of the committee,

My name is Chris, and I am a Legislative Assistant for House District 48, but am testifying today in my personal capacity to ask for your support for adequate, year-round staffing positions in legislative offices.

I started working as a Legislative Assistant earlier this year, and am doing what I always wanted: helping people, connecting with constituents about their concerns and addressing their challenges, and contributing to a legislative process that will make a difference in the lives of Oregonians for decades to come. I love my job.

At the same time, with the end of the 2025 session looming, I do face difficult decisions and a high degree of uncertainty about my future. This is the case for the majority of legislative staff in the building, and the anxiety of not knowing where one's next paycheck will come from two months from now, or how one will afford health insurance after Sine Die is hanging over many of them. It is hard to fully focus on one's job when one is beginning their applications for their next position, and worried about how they will scrape by after June 29th, and I am certain that there is a real, substantial, fiscal and legislative cost to this, impacting all of the work being done in this building.

Earlier this week, a constituent visited our office, eager to learn more about legislative careers and opportunities. He was very interested in the prospect of being able to work in a legislative office to help constituents and pass legislation to help his fellow Oregonians. But he was also significantly discouraged upon learning that Legislative Assistants are only hired for 6 months in odd years, and a mere 6 weeks in even years.

This is a serious problem. When positions at lobbying firms and state agencies pay more AND offer the stability of full-time employment, it is incredibly difficult for legislative offices, or even the legislature generally speaking, to retain talented and experienced individuals. Part-time staff receive training, learn about specific policy areas, and build relationships inside the capitol and in their members' districts, and then leave, taking all of their know-how and institutional knowledge with them. The following year, this process repeats, and new staffers are subjected to

the learning curve of familiarizing themselves with all of the procedures, members, and advocates necessary to do their jobs effectively. This comes at a cost, adding additional burdens to the legislative process, and hurts overall government efficiency.

On the other hand, consider what we have to gain from a more stable legislature. The most qualified and experienced staff could be retained, instead of moving on to different careers. Continuity would mean that staffers who gain in-depth knowledge of specific policy areas could build on work from prior sessions without having to start from scratch. Relationships built between staffers and advocates would carry over from session to session, ensuring more seamless formulation and refinement of policy. And staffers would not be burdened by the fear of what comes after they receive their last paycheck and their health coverage ends, ensuring that they can devote all of their energy to serving their members and constituents.

Increasing legislative budgets to allow offices to hire year-round Legislative Assistants is a sensible policy which improves governance, stability, and efficiency within Oregon's legislative body, with a multitude of downstream impacts for constituents and the people of Oregon.

I strongly urge your support for funding full-time Legislative Assistant positions.

Chris Stuckart  
IBEW 89 Member