

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

My name is Mie Kumin and I have worked as legislative staff in some capacity since January 2023. Now in my third session, I have worked with 3 legislators, 8 fellow staffers, and in various roles and levels of FTE. Like many staffers, I have had to piece together work during the interim, including campaign work for my member which has impacted my health insurance coverage, accumulation of benefits, and ability to plan for my future.

This lack of job stability is deeply unsustainable for staff, both financially and otherwise. Members overwhelmingly want to keep staff, but are faced with impossible budget choices that can mean deciding between retaining an experienced staffer or affording office supplies, mailers, conferences, or paying interns. There is a reason that there are so few senior staffers; many staff leave the legislature to work for agencies, the lobby, or private sector due to burnout, low wages, and job insecurity. The churn of the legislature limits this work to those that can afford to take on a temporary job. Adequate, stable staffing is a basic step the legislature can take to further professionalize this job and make it a career, not just a stepping stone.

Tenured staff are skilled at serving constituents and their members and are a source of invaluable institutional knowledge, which is crucial for freshmen legislators. Staffers who have worked multiple sessions build strong relationships with stakeholders, members, and the communities they serve. Offices that have proper staff capacity and experience provide comprehensive, timely constituent services and develop well vetted legislation.

As a citizen legislature, most members return to their lay jobs during the interim, often on top of running campaigns. I have worked briefly as the sole staffer during an interim; this should not be the norm. No coverage means that taking even one day off is a challenge, as members would be left without support while juggling campaigns, work, and ongoing legislative duties. Additional staffing during the interim ensures coverage that is essential to retain staff and prevent burnout.

The timing of session, and especially the short session, means that policy development happens primarily during the interim, with staff supporting workgroups and ensuring that bills are on track to meet deadlines. The interim is when teams can get work done that would be impossible to manage during the fast pace of session. It's a crucial time that staffers lose out on when they get hired right before session and then dropped at the end.

Please find ways to ensure that legislative offices are sustainably staffed year round with two full time legislative assistants!