

TO: Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On General Government  
RE: Support of sustainable funding for Legislative Staff  
April 30, 2025

Co-Chairs Gorsek and Smith, and Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on General Government,

My name is Inna Levin, and I am Chief of Staff for House District 45. I write today in my personal capacity, as a member of IBEW 89, and not on behalf of my boss or this office. I urgently request your support for reexamining the Legislative Assembly budget with the goal of ensuring adequate, year-round staffing in legislative offices.

Like many of my colleagues in this building, I believe this goal is responsive to the myriad of ways our collective work has changed over the last dozen years. As we continue to **work together to serve Oregonians to the best of our abilities**, proper staffing is essential for effective governance, quality constituent services, and successful policy development.

For members who have full time jobs outside the legislature, having trained, trustworthy, knowledgeable, proactive staff is a major determinant of success. As the members are unable to participate in the day-to-day functions of their office, Chiefs of Staff must pick up the majority of policy development, work group attendance, subject matter study, research, and stakeholder engagement. This is true especially for policy-savvy staff and/or those who have special expertise in areas of interest to their members. Many Chiefs are specifically hired for this expertise; for instance, a legislator who chairs a healthcare committee may prioritize hiring a Chief with a background in healthcare.

But our compensation doesn't always reflect our expertise and abilities. That is because staff salaries within a legislative office is a zero/sum game. The more I rise on the pay scale, the less money remains in our budget for support staff. Some Chiefs choose to reduce their own pay so they can afford to bring on additional staff. **So the choice is to sacrifice either the salary we earn or the support we need.** Without support staff, it is not possible for a Chief, no matter how diligent, experienced, or efficient, to carry out every aspect of their responsibilities.

**The interim, when our working bosses re-prioritize their paying jobs and hand off many of their responsibilities to us, is the time when we also lose our support staff.** Along with duties that would fall to our bosses, we are picking up the admin duties of the LA2s. We are crafting policy and meeting with stakeholders; often engaging in high-level negotiations or learning about new policy areas, while also managing constituent casework.

**Our constituents' issues and concerns don't stop or slow down because it's interim.** Their problems are not part-time and our decreased staff capacity is not their problem. They expect our responses to be just as timely as they are during session. And, they *need* that immediate assistance; too many of the problems they come to us with could literally be life or death. During the previous interim, for example, I worked w/ several constituents who were in danger of being evicted, and needed immediate assistance not only working through the confusing bureaucracy that led them to that point, but also scrambling to help them find shelter so they didn't become another homelessness statistic.

Without an LA2, I am also responsible for responding to all scheduling requests. Often, if lobbyists, or constituents, don't hear back from me in what they feel is an acceptable time, they call my boss directly. They complain that her staff is unresponsive. So, we instate a goal of responding to *all* meeting requests within a week (or 2 weeks. Or 4 days). That means **either the policy work or the constituent support has to be deprioritized.**

Having said that, **I want to make clear that I love my job.** I find it challenging and rewarding. I take pride in it, I work hard, and I do it well. *That's* why the fact that I can't keep up with the workload is so upsetting. Our problem is **not** that the work is stressful and overwhelming, though it is. It's that we know we could do better. With the proper tools, with our leaders setting us up for success, we could support our Legislators better, who, in turn, would do better by their constituents. **I am an Oregonian too, and I want better for Oregonians.**

**I want better for our bill partners, agencies, and other legislative office staff too.** District offices not having the capacity to properly develop legislative concepts in the interim translates to extra burdens for Legislative Council and Agency staff during session. LC is left to figure out details of proposed programs, or fill in the blanks of sparse Legislative Concept Draft requests. This more often than not means we are still dialing in the details well into session. That also means we're not able to run fully flushed out concepts by the agencies that will be tasked with implementing these policies until we are all at crunch time and session deadlines are fast approaching. Important details don't come to light until the first public hearing, and we scramble to fix things with amendments. **Bill concepts are not as carefully vetted, as deeply researched, or as widely socialized as they ought to be.**

Oregonians deserve better. **They deserve for us to show up for them at our best, every day.** And that requires a fully staffed office. Just as Legislators rely on Chiefs to attend to the duties outside their capacity, **we rely on our LA2s to do just about everything else.**

**LAs are the backbone of legislative work.** They are the ones who keep things running day to day. And they also deserve better. They do not deserve to be laid off as soon as the session work stops. They don't deserve to have to look for part time work while they wait around for their real job to start again. They cannot be expected to do so indefinitely. We are losing smart, talented staff in favor of spending limited resources hiring and training new staff every session.

Every time a new staffer is hired, they must spend their first days on the job watching training videos, instead of diving into the work they were hired to do. Every new hire requires several email exchanges with at least three members of the Human Resources team. It takes at least one full month of back and forths to get a new hire up and running, with payroll, email access, a state laptop, etc. **Serving Oregonians at the State Legislature is not seasonal work; it is a high-level, specialized, professional career and LAs deserve to be treated and compensated accordingly.**

Lastly, there is the issue of institutional knowledge. The Legislative process is full of opaque rules and unfamiliar customs that even the longest-serving staff don't have memorized. Yet we expect newly hired LA2s to be up to speed as soon as session starts — when it takes at least a session to learn all the rules, understand all the deadlines, learn all the faces. **LA2s are the front line of a legislative office.** If they are rotated in and out every year, they don't have the necessary relationships with constituents, lobbyists, other staff, or members to know who is a trusted partner and who isn't. **The Capitol is a highly politicized, yet public space. It takes knowledge and finesse to navigate it appropriately.** Putting this incredible responsibility on new staff who are just entering this world for the first time is problematic.

I urge prioritizing sufficient staffing levels to **meet the changing realities of legislative work and the growing demands of our constituents.** This is an investment in a talented, eager workforce, a legislature that is more functional and effective, and policy that is thoughtful, informed, widely-vetted, and expertly crafted. Making this investment now will save the legislature time and money in the long run.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,  
Inna Levin,  
*Chief of Staff and*  
*IBEW 89 Member*