

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

My name is Peter Wedlake. From 2018 to 2023, I worked in the Oregon Legislature across two legislative offices, serving as an intern, legislative assistant, and, most recently, as chief of staff. Over those years, I've seen firsthand how vital it is for Oregonians to have a government that is accessible, responsive, and grounded in the communities it serves. That kind of service is only possible when legislative offices are adequately staffed.

The day-to-day work of a legislative staffer is hard to summarize. It might mean tracking down an unemployment case, developing concepts into workable policy, answering a worried constituent's call, or preparing for a community event. The constant thread is service. Our work is grounded in the lives of the people we serve.

But the need has only grown. When I started working for a freshman legislator who was sworn in just after winning their primary in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, I walked into a caseload that was twice what many offices had experienced pre-pandemic. And with just one full-time staffer available during the interim, even basic correspondence became difficult. Our staff struggled to keep up, and I know we were not alone.

Even now, caseloads remain high, but what's often invisible is the cost of constant staff turnover. Relying on short-term, seasonal staff creates a churn that weakens the institution over time. Every few months, offices are forced to spend critical time and resources training new employees, many of whom leave just as they've gained the skills to maximize their impact. That instability hurts not only staff, but also the constituents who rely on us to deliver constituent services and effective governance.

I've worked alongside some of the most dedicated, thoughtful, and service-oriented people I've ever met. They show up because they care deeply about solving the hardest problems facing our state. But that commitment can only go so far without institutional support. If we want a legislature that meets the needs of Oregonians and builds public trust, we need to invest in its staff.

Thank you for your time, and for your consideration.