

May 2, 2025

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

My name is Kenzy Seifert, and I have worked in the Oregon Legislature for the better part of the last five years. When I joined the Senate Majority Office as a short session Office Coordinator in January 2020, I understood that my position was to last seven, maybe eight weeks. On the eve of my original separation date, I received the message that no one was to come into the office—we would all be working from home instead. That was March 12, 2020.

As the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the country and around the world, I had a front row seat to the new crush of demands and responsibilities legislative offices took on to serve Oregonians in a time of fear and uncertainty that had no equal in the majority of popular memory. I was one of the lucky ones, having my position extended for weeks at a time as I tracked rapidly changing public health and safety guidance for both internal and external communications, took on overflow casework from other legislative offices, and staffed three special sessions among other duties.

Lucky as I was, I felt the constant threat of losing my position as budgets were crunched and re-run and my salary was cobbled together from multiple sources. Had business been proceeding as usual that spring and summer, there would not have been enough to retain my services, but with no traveling or other normal budgetary needs, I was able to use the opportunity to advance my public service career. Thanks to that continuity and the growth and experience it gave me, I am now in my second long session as an LA 4. I'm grateful I was lucky. I don't want other staffers to have to be.

Members, the work done by everyone involved in this deliberative process we call democracy is special. It calls on all of us as individuals to bring our unique selves to our work so that we have the best chance of representing all of Oregon as we consider her needs and seek solutions to her challenges. But make no mistake, this work is a team sport, and the longer we insist on playing with a short roster, the worse off we all become. I won't torture the sports metaphor as much as I'd like, but allow me one more comparison: if our quality of play is poor, if we can't or won't professionalize in a manner that my colleagues have astutely pointed out is frankly expected of us in this moment, the public will stop showing up. And exactly because democracy isn't a game, that is not trust we can afford to lose.

I therefore give my unequivocal and enthusiastic support to funding adequate, year-round legislative staffing.

Sincere thanks,

Kenzy Seifert