

In in the past few years, the word “unprecedented” appeared daily in news headlines that described the constantly changing circumstances. An unprecedented pandemic led to massive supply shortages, overtaxed services, and widespread deaths across our nation and state. Unprecedented environmental changes led to larger and more numerous fires that caused more damage than ever before and extensive unsafe air quality levels. Unprecedented inflation led to unaffordable cost of living standards and increased need for public services.

Despite the unpredictability and volatility of our current times, as the states frontline workers, we push forward to provide the best public services to our states residents. Why do we do this? Because we take pride in making Oregon work.

The pandemic years have exacerbated the pervasiveness and severity of many issues negatively affecting our work, the services we provide Oregonians, and the wellbeing of state employees and the public we serve. These issues can no longer be ignored or brushed aside, and, we will address in this bargaining session. Our workloads are ever-increasing. Our Safety and health are constantly compromised. We are subject to physical assault in the workplace with no ability to defend ourselves, and our health is consistently endangered during our workdays. We provide support for our new coworkers while struggling to complete our own workloads. Recruitment and retention rates are at their lowest in decades. We are expected to move seamlessly from one traumatic interaction to another, without immediate and effective support from state agencies. We regularly provide empathetic support, guidance, individualized services while consistently de-escalating threatening and hostile situations.

Despite these challenges in our workspaces, we continue to risk our health and safety and accept increasing workloads. We do this because we believe in supporting vulnerable populations- in our communities including children, families, the elderly, and people with disabilities, those that are unemployed, those with little to no access to health care, and other marginalized communities.

But now is the time to focus the lens back on the state employees that make Oregon work. Our work tells us to put Oregonians first. But as state employees, who are, ourselves, Oregonians. We ask that ~~the state to~~ put us first, so that we can have the capacity to best serve our state. It is the employees in our agencies- the Oregon Employment Department, Oregon Health Authority, and Department of Human Services that make Oregon work.

Imagine a week without the essential workers ~~that~~ make up the Human Services Coalition. From unemployment claims to upholding the states health and safety to promoting the wellbeing of children in crisis, these things are only a small drop in the bucket of the myriad jobs that we do to invest in communities across our state.

Now it is time for our agencies to invest in us. Our proposals demonstrate the priorities for our agencies employees. They show our desire to promote the services that we provide across the state by making sure that we are safe at work, we serve Oregonians to the best of our abilities, and are compensated for the work that we do. No state employee should be on state

assistance, yet we are seeing many of our co workers take on additional jobs to make ends meet. No state employee should feel like they are risking their lives by going to work, yet we encounter physical , emotional, and mental abuse while we are on the job. No state employee should suffer ill health effects from the job. We know the work to resolve these issues will be difficult, but these proposals seek to begin to remedy some of the problems that we are encountering in the workplace. We have the passion and the drive to serve our fellow Oregonians. Imagine how much more we could do when we are safe, supported, and health.