



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE DISTRICT 35

June 24, 2025

Timothy G. Sekerak
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Vote Explanation on [HB 5016 A](#)

Dear Chief Clerk Sekerak,

Thank you for accepting my vote explanation for [HB 5016 A](#). Today I rise in unsurprising opposition to HB 5016, which is our agency budget. I want to begin by saying every department in our agency does amazing work, we could not do this work without them. My dissent on this bill today is not a reflection of the critical work everyone employed in this building does, rather I am standing today in defense of that work.

Keen-eyed legislators may notice that this bill came to us out of the Capital Construction subcommittee of Ways and Means, but it's not a major capital project. So what's going on here? *For now*, I sit on the General Government subcommittee of Ways and Means, that is the usual subcommittee this budget comes through. We had two informational meetings and a public hearing about this bill, as well as multiple meetings where the assembly budget was discussed. The hot topic of all these discussions was around including full time year round funding for our second legislative assistants. The budget before us today does not include that funding. In fact, an amendment for that funding was denied consideration in committees where it had support. Our committee was actually denied consideration of the entire budget, not just that amendment.

Prior to this Session, our staff, the first unionized legislative staff in the country, was in bargaining. As a staunch labor advocate, it was unusual for me to take on the role of management. But as management, myself and some of my colleagues, requested updates on the bargaining being done in our name. Eventually we got an update that included the discussion about funding for a year round second staffer. I know many members supported proposals for a second full-time LA. But we were told that adding additional year-round staff





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could not be a subject of bargaining because it would impact the budget, which requires approval from the legislative assembly. A bipartisan bicameral sign on letter that requested funding for LA2s circulated in December and was sent to leadership of both chambers and the Ways and Means co-chairs. In addition to this and the advocacy of staff, numerous legislators from across the aisle and chamber advocated for this funding in committee hearings over the last couple of months. We are now a mere week away from constitutional Sine Die, but still in session, where we were told we could make improvements to staffing levels and we've been stonewalled with the measure taken out of the hands of its original committee.

Members of this body have overwhelmingly indicated that the workload is too high for just our chiefs of staff to handle as a solo staffer, especially as a "citizen legislature" where many of us have to maintain day jobs. As Representative Gomberg has mentioned since the public hearing, we had over ten percent of our colleagues appear in support of this funding request. 12 legislators testified from both chambers and both parties in an 8 am committee meeting. Not to mention the support of every single one of the eight members of our committee who spoke in support of this change. And while I appreciate the effort to find a solution, which today takes the form of a budget note to research the workload in other states and how they deal with it, that does not solve the problem that we, as members, brought to our presiding officers. Whether or not there are similar workloads in other states, and how they address that is immaterial to the issues we face here in this Legislature. It might be interesting information; I'll even bet there are some innovative solutions out there. But there are legislative bodies in this country that don't have any staff at all. Will this research yield the answer that we're lucky to have any staff at all?

When we, as independently elected officials, are denied the tools to perform the functions of our office at the level of need required by our constituents, it denies our constituents the representation and access to essential constituent services that they are entitled to and deserve.

In our subcommittee we often discuss the importance of redundancy among staffers in our vital State agencies. So why do we expect a single staffer to run our offices during the interim? Why are we hindering our ability to maintain standards if our chief of staff needs to take family leave, experiences an emergency, or simply needs time to deal with the illnesses and life





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situations that arise for us all on the basis of being human? The structure of our legislative staffing promotes high turnover and staff burn-out. Our legislative session timeline is too short for staff to take time off without it negatively impacting their office, their work, and their Legislator. But they also cannot take time in the interim without the office going totally unstaffed in their absence. This is a highly specialized field of work that requires niche skills and dedication, and every session, we lose amazing staff with a wealth of knowledge because of the seasonal and unstable nature of their roles. We must do better.

Finally, colleagues, I want to discuss something I've brought up several times in multiple contexts this year: **process** and what isn't working in that process. This budget should have come out of our subcommittee. But what our subcommittee wanted, after hearing overwhelming testimony in favor, was not honored. As I was considering voting No on a budget that did not include year-round LA2 funding I had to accept that I could be temporarily replaced in order to get the needed votes, or perhaps replaced on the committee altogether. This is not unique, as we saw last week when in the Transportation committee, a member who would not vote for the bill was discharged from his assignment. Today as I speak on this bill I have also had to accept that I may lose a committee assignment that I value. But that is what I am here for, to speak up against the status quo regardless of personal cost to myself. I also know and appreciate that many of you are not in the position to do the same. As I checked in with several of my colleagues about this budget, colleagues who had been staunch advocates for year-round LA2 funding, it seemed to me that people felt intimidated. Members expressed concerns to me about their gavels, their bills, and their funding requests. When a majority is overruled by a few people that is not what is defined as a democratic process. For that reason, I am opposed to this budget so long as it does not include the year-round LA2 funding we were told could be allocated via this process. For these reasons, I am a no vote on HB 5001.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Farrah Chaichi".

Representative Farrah Chaichi
House District 35