

Legislators Respond to Union Testimony by Providing Workload Victory at DHS

Legislators have a growing understanding of the impact of workload on the quality of services within DHS. For years, SEIU members have been going to the Capitol and speaking with legislators about how overwhelming workloads prevent them from providing the quality public services that Oregonians need. Nowhere were the effects of workload more pronounced than in the Department of Human Services where internal study after study documented the crisis and its very real impact on clients. During the legislative session DHS reported that within the Children and Families Division alone, workload models demonstrated 38% understaffing in Child Welfare and 50% understaffing in Self Sufficiency just to meet minimum legal requirements.

With leaders such as Representative Carolyn Tomei, chair of the House Human Services Committee, and Tina Kotek, co-chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services, our members' voices were finally heard in 2009. Despite the worst budget crisis Oregon has seen in decades, the legislature understood the unprecedented demand DHS workers face and approved 255 new positions to address overwhelming demand in eligibility determinations and 186 new positions to help with expansion of OHP and Healthy Kids within the Self Sufficiency office.



Mies Matz

And thanks to heartfelt, effective testimony and lobby visits by Child Welfare workers including **Barbara Casey** and **Mies Matz** the legislature added 130 new staff in order to begin to address the chronic workload issues Child Welfare has been facing for years.

Casey, who is SEIU 503 statewide secretary-treasurer and also chairs CAPE, the union's political arm, got a virtual front-row seat for watching how political accountability can translate into front-line results.

"DHS workers like myself are a leading force for quality services and better living standards for all Oregon workers," Casey said. "By advocating strongly for our clients in this time of unprecedented need—one in six Oregonians are on food assistance and one in three use DHS services—SEIU 503 was able to move legislators to allocate more workers to assist our families and maintain those quality programs. As a DHS caseworker I felt that our legislators understood the value of our members' work and the services we provide."

For detailed information on your legislators' votes and updates on political activity of importance to SEIU 503 members, go to www.seiu503.org.