

"I decided to dedicate my life to public services and I knew I wasn't going to make as much as in the private sector, but it was worth it to me for the people of Oregon I get to help," says Alicia, a DHS worker.

"I'm just starting my career, and the idea that my retirement could just disappear might force me into the private sector because I don't make a lot here. That's why I'm here today, because I really believe in this union and the people of Oregon."

"It's about respect...whether its an ODOT employee who wants to know why the Legislature is attacking his benefits, or a homecare worker who wants to know why they are paid late, or a university employee who wants to know why they are raising tuition and laying off coworkers – it all comes back to respect, to feeling valued. When you are on your own it often feels like you can't get respect. That's the beauty of our union. With 72,000 people at your back, you can demand respect!"

Melissa Unger, SEIU 503 Executive Director

The PERS legislation, which includes a 1% to 2.5% reduction in retirement benefits, is being considered by the State Senate this week.

Homecare and personal support workers are also bargaining their contract this year, one that will govern the pay, benefits, and working conditions for 30,000 care providers who work directly in their client's homes. Because care providers are so essential to long-term care of Oregon's seniors and people with disabilities, many care consumers have stepped forward to support our bargaining campaign.

"I show support for my caregivers because those ladies go above and beyond, more than you could imagine for all of us," says Margie Forgoso, a client who receives support from state homecare workers. "I support them in every step they are taking in this union."

One of the key issues we are pushing forward on this year is a retirement plan for care providers, something we desperately need. Together we have won major victories on wages and healthcare benefits, but many homecare workers still struggle to save and plan for a secure retirement.

"I recently joined the union because I feel the members do need a fair contract this year and I am here to support that," says new homecare worker Rebecca Leonard.

Now workers around the state are building on this momentum as contract negotiations heat up. With actions in worksites and communities around the state, we are demanding an end to stagnant wages and for state officials to address real problems that impact every member of our union.

