



**Senate Committee on Workforce and General Government
Melissa Unger, Political Director of SEIU Local 503
Testimony on SB 1532 -1
February 2, 2016**

Chair Dembrow, members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. For the record, my name is Melissa Unger and I am the political director for SEIU Local 503. We are here to testify regarding SB 1532 and the -1 amendments.

SEIU Local 503 and Local 49 represent over 65,000 workers statewide who work in a variety of professions, including state workers, care givers, janitors, hospital workers, and more.

While I want to talk about the differences in the policies that are being discussed today, I wanted to start by talking a bit about my family. My husband and I have a three year old in a childcare center in Portland. Our childcare center is great but it doesn't serve organic food or anything fancy like that. For just three days a week, we pay \$1170 a month, which is \$14,040 a year. We are expecting another child in May and at that point we will pay \$2000 a month in childcare costs, \$24,000 a year for three days a week. Being able to put your child in daycare that fits your needs should be something every parent can achieve but with extremely high costs it is unaffordable for most families. For someone working at minimum wage it would be impossible to afford a daycare center and programs like ERDC only serve 1 in 6 eligible families. I tell this story because even with the increases we are talking about today, childcare centers will be completely unaffordable for most people working in underpaid jobs, even with both parents working full time.

Over half of counties have a self-sufficiency wage that is over \$13.50 and 7 counties have self-sufficiency wages over \$20. The self-sufficiency wage is defined by the University of Washington as the wage it costs just to make ends meet—get to work, pay your rent, pay your bills, and put food on the table—nothing extravagant like a night at the movies. By 2022, that self-sufficiency wage will continue to increase, as costs increase and likely all counties will be over the proposals being discussed today.

Our members have endorsed both ballot measures \$15 Now and Raise the Wage. We have been very active in the Raise the Wage Coalition, where we have worked to raise the wage to \$13.50 and lifting pre-emption. If that measure was to pass, using the average CPI, the statewide wage would be around \$14.77 in 2022. We wish we were here today talking about passing our measure into law because we do believe that lifting the wage to \$13.50 as quickly as impossible is an important step to helping

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people figure out how to pay their bills, put a roof over their head, and food on their table throughout the state. But we also understand that there are many that are concerned that the raise is too fast and doesn't take into account differences in our state.

We appreciate the Governor's leadership in finding a path to a meaningful increase in wages for workers that takes into account a reasonable phase in for business and the difference in cost of living across the state. While we don't think it gets us as far as we want to go, the dash one amendment does put real money in workers pockets this summer. Workers making \$9.25 an hour, who went without any increase this year, 50 cents an hour or \$1050 a year for a full time worker means paying bills that would have went unpaid or paying for the ever increasing costs of rent.

While the proposals put forward don't give most workers in the state a wage that would put them at self-sufficiency, it does move us in the right direction. There are hundreds of thousands of workers going to work every day who can't make ends meet no matter how hard they work and we believe no one should work full time and be making less than \$20,000 a year, but instead people who work hard should have a fair shot to provide for their family.