

Testimony
Senate Bill 2189 – Department of Human Services
House Appropriations Committee
Representative Svedjan, Chairman
February 1, 2007

Chairman Svedjan, members of the House Appropriations Committee, my name is Carol Olson, Executive Director of the Department of Human Services. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this committee and am here to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2189.

We appreciate the opportunity our Department had in working with the interim committee to offer information about employee turnover and hiring difficulties and to offer suggestions to try and solve some of the pressing salary and benefit issues facing the State.

I would like to share with you some of the recent examples of the Department's difficulties:

- Qualified applicants for a registered nurse position and a data input operator position were offered jobs but declined due to low salaries.
- A psychologist at one of our Human Service Centers is leaving to take a job in the private sector for \$120,000 per year. At the Human Service Center, this individual was earning \$54,516 per year.
- A Human Service Center hired a human relations counselor on 7/1/06, and the person resigned on 11/9/06. The next person hired to fill this position called and left a message on the day before his start date saying that he would be taking another job at a much higher rate of pay.
- One Human Service Center has an opening for four community home counselors to work in an adolescent treatment facility.

Despite extensive advertising including targeted recruitment aimed at university students with majors in behavioral health fields, the Center has received only one applicant who subsequently declined to be interviewed. This forces existing employees to work overtime and further contributes to burnout. Because of salary and benefit differences, staff often leave to work in restaurants, manufacturing, or nursing homes and group homes.

- A maintenance worker at one of the Human Service Centers was hired on 9/25/06 only to quit on 10/31/06 for a higher paying job.
- Probably the most discouraging sequence of events in hiring a candidate for a position occurred at the Child Support Enforcement Division. A person was offered a job, and the next day she declined because the pay was too low. A second offer was made to the next applicant, and the new candidate accepted with a January 29 start date. On January 26, the individual called to say he had decided on a much better job offer. We left a message for the third candidate offering the position, but the applicant called and told us she had already accepted another job. That exhausted the original pool of candidates that fit the Department's needs. So the process for hiring will have to start all over again.

Senate Bill 2189 will help solve some of the Department's recruitment and retention issues.

On behalf of the Department of Human Services and all the dedicated and hard working employees who work for us, I support Senate Bill 2189.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.