



Testimony of Chris Gardner in Support of HR3/SR4
Appropriations Committee – Feb. 28, 2020

Good morning, Chairpersons Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Formica and Lavielle, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Chris Gardner. I work as a Program Supervisor for the Department of Children and Families. I have more than 20 years of state service. I am also the President of AFSCME Local 3419, which represents the 100 DCF Program Supervisors. Program Supervisors make the most difficult, heartrending and challenging decisions in all of DCF, whether to remove a potentially abused or neglected child or if not, under what circumstances to allow that child to safely and successfully stay in their home.

I am here to speak in favor of HR 3 and SR 4.

More than three years ago, our staff voted overwhelmingly to unionize and join AFSCME Council 4.

We subsequently engaged in negotiations for our first collective bargaining agreement. After reaching impasse, both sides agreed to binding arbitration. The arbitrated award is before you today.

This award balances the needs of all stakeholders. It is in line with other state employee agreements and it matches the SEBAC pattern for wages and benefits, but does nothing to recover the raises our members missed before organizing.

I should note that between the years of 2010 and 2017, Program Supervisors had six years of zero percent wage increases, while most state employee unions had only 4 years of zeros. As a result of this wage compression, some of the social work supervisors and social workers we oversee make more in base salary than some program supervisors, and many more do so with overtime, which we will not receive.

There are no unusual or exceptional provisions in this arbitrated award; DCF Program Supervisors gained no exceptional benefits.

Sitting beside me is AFSCME Council 4 Staff Representative Neal Cunningham, who served as our chief spokesperson and advocate during contract negotiations.

My colleagues and I are proud of the work we do to protect the welfare of children who are abused and neglected and the welfare of children and families whose interests might be best served by offering the family necessary services and keeping the family together while still ensuring the safety of the children.

We urge your approval of HR 3 and SR 4.

Thank you. Neal and I are happy to answer any questions.