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**TESTIMONY OF SUSAN TOUSIGNANT, PRESIDENT OF THE  
MASSACHUSETTS HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS UNION, SEIU LOCAL 509**

*As prepared for the Joint Committee on Public Service – October 31, 2013*

Thank you to Chairmen Brownsberger and Michlewitz for the opportunity to appear before you today – and to the entire Joint Committee for your work on the important issues that impact the commonwealth’s public servants every day.

My name is Susan Tousignant, and I am the president of Service Employees International Union Local 509. Our union represents more than 17,000 human service and mental health workers across Massachusetts, including over 7,500 in the public sector. These workers provide vital services to at-risk populations throughout the commonwealth – from child welfare and transitional assistance to direct aide for people with physical and developmental disabilities. So when we talk about changes to state employee healthcare, it is these workers – these future retirees – who will feel the greatest impact.

Human service workers aren’t just state employees; we’re also taxpayers. That places us in a unique position to understand and recognize that the estimated \$40 billion liability is real – and that it must be dealt with quickly. But as we work to address this significant challenge, we must ensure that working families and seniors are protected in the process. As affected human service workers will soon testify, House Bill 59 – the governor’s proposed changes to retiree healthcare – simply goes too far.

As House Bill 59 stands today, workers who entered public service later in life could face serious harm. For example, a 63-year-old social worker with eight years of experience is currently two years away from retirement. But if HB59 is implemented as-is, that same employee would have to work an additional 22 years to receive the same retirement benefits. Twenty-two years of added service isn’t feasible for most workers, let alone those who are close to retirement age or dealing with health issues.

Similarly, this legislation will have a disproportionate impact on low-wage workers and those facing fixed incomes in retirement. It is these workers who can least afford a spike in their healthcare costs, yet they will bear 100% of the cost burden of HB59’s reforms. Meanwhile, the bill fails to offer any real cost-saving measures other than a spike in out-of-pocket expenses for seniors. We’re not talking about reining in healthcare costs or addressing overcharges by major hospital chains like Partners. The responsibility falls to future retirees, and them alone.

Perhaps most alarming is that House Bill 59 penalizes workers who must take a leave of absence for the birth of a child or death of a loved one. In the wake of a joyous occasion or outright tragedy, no worker should have to worry about the impact a necessary leave may have on their ability to make ends meet.

So while House Bill 59 – in its current form – goes too far, human service workers look forward to working with the legislature to find fair, effective solutions that address these financial challenges while protecting future retirees. In that spirit, you’ll now hear the personal stories of several state employees who have a great deal at stake in this debate – three of the thousands of future retirees who are directly impacted by this legislation.

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