

Senate Workforce Committees
Testimony in Support of SB 470
April 1, 2015

Chair and members of the committee:

My name is Anna Taylor and I am a Special Education Program Assistant for the Beaverton School District. I speak in favor of extending unemployment insurance eligibility, SB 470.

Working for the school district is as much a labor of love as it is a professional career track. None of us committed to providing a quality education for children do it for the money. That is especially true of classified school employees, no matter what their job classification is.

Most classifications of classified school district employees (Education Assistants, Nutrition Services, Library and IT staff, some clerical staff, campus security, Transportation Services) are actually “seasonal workers” and are employed between 180 and 210 days per year. The rest of the time our employer (the School District) “shuts down” for an extended period of time (winter break, summer vacation) and we are “temporarily unemployed.” That is why our annual earnings are so low, in spite of what might be thought of as a reasonable hourly-wage, compared to a year-round or 260 day per year employee.

Our monthly earnings are the # of hours we work per day, times the total number of days in our respective contracts, divided by the number of paychecks we opt to receive. The district currently requires new hires to receive their earnings over 12 paychecks, but when I was hired in 2006 we still had a choice of receiving only 10. Being forced to receive 12 paychecks per year under my current contract (Special Ed Program Assistant, Step 9, 180 day contract, 7 hrs/day) would make being a Para- Professional Educator a career I couldn’t afford to pursue. Even with a second job my income would be so low that I would not be able to meet my monthly obligations no matter how modest.

The summer months are always the most difficult to manage. The loss of district income puts an extra burden on my second job to increase the number of hours I work during those ten weeks or I have to find additional income from another source. I generally do both and by trimming my expenses to the bear minimum and a little robbing Peter to pay Paul, I usually make it through to September 20th when I will receive my first district paycheck.

This past summer was a little different and ultimately especially difficult. As a second occupation I am a personal caregiver. On July 21, 2014, after almost two years, my client and I mutually agreed to a parting of the ways. It was a difficult and emotional break and it

did take a minute to get my feet back under me, but ultimately early August is a very difficult time to find a part time job.

Unlike every other classification of seasonal worker, public or private, school district classified employees are barred, by law, from collecting unemployment insurance benefits. Without the safety net of unemployment insurance, this year, reaching the September 20th payday was almost impossible. I say almost because failure really wasn't an option. I have a household to maintain, people who depend on me. My rent for September was short paid and several bills went past due. I made arrangements with other debtors and received a "forbearance" on my school loans. And now, after many months I am still doing catch up. I burned through every bit of savings I had and at 55 years old, I can honestly say it had been a great many years since I was that broke. I have worked my whole adult life and contributed willingly into the system, but when I needed it, desperately, it wasn't available. As a classified school district employee, how did we ever get so privileged as to be ineligible?

As an interesting side note, it was pointed out to me by a co-worker and I have confirmed with our payroll department that the district pays unemployment insurance on behalf of classified employees each month as a part of our payroll. And the law still prohibits us from collecting. Please do everything you can to repair this terrible inequity! Thank you.