

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

Chair and members of the committee:

My name is Beth Lampert and I live in Prineville Oregon. I would like to tell you my story about working as a Para Educator in Special Education. My son, who was multiple-disabled, died when he was eight years old. Eventually I realized why I was miserable in life. Not only was I missing my son, which could not be changed, but I missed being a part of the handicapped community. Since 2000, I have worked for my local school district. My love of the disabled community and wanting to help educate disabled children has been a perilous balance between self-fulfillment and poverty. When school is not in session, the classified employees are laid off. This results in a severe financial and mental hardship.

I found that I could not live on the small wage I earned working, and moved in with my mother. She benefited from having me as a roommate. A few years later my daughter moved home after experiencing the terrible trauma of domestic violence. I found myself needing more income to support my pregnant daughter and grandson, and pay the attorney fees to help her move forward in life. As soon as her physician, therapist and I got her mentally stable enough to be able to care for her son while I worked, I went to work at a day care facility. I was able to work daily after my primary job, on in-service days, and during vacations.

I enjoy working and have performed many jobs in the past, sometimes up to three at a time so I could provide for my family. Prineville continues to be hard hit by the economy. At one point the school district closed for summer a few weeks early, then about six weeks later the child day care center permanently closed. I was laid off of both jobs. At the end of the recession, employment is still difficult to find in Prineville. The local economy was doing a little better but this winter a mill closed after it collapsed during a wind storm.

Splitting the bills between my mother and I worked well, but over time in addition to my other job or jobs I fell into the role of becoming her caregiver. I decided I needed a change in order to save revenue for my retirement and started taking classes online. I could not be gone long enough to attend a brick and mortar college after work each evening. Change yet again hit hard as my mother, my roommate passed away this winter. My expenses have now doubled.

With both a happy and a sad heart I will graduate this fall with my Bachelor's Degree in Human Resource Management. I am sad to leave the handicapped community and education while excited to look for work that will allow me to rise above near poverty.

Classified employees clearly deserve unemployment as most all other employees in the state of Oregon are allowed. Laid off classified employee are not eligible for unemployment, but many are eligible for food stamps, HUD housing, and other social services. In the private sector this is coined corporate welfare. This is expecting the tax payers to help support the employees and their families and provide the benefit package because the employees are underworked and underpaid.

When I think of Corporate Welfare it is not just Wal-Mart that comes to mind but the state of Oregon for allowing this injustice to dedicated hard working school district employees that provide the critical services necessary so children can be educated. It is shameful that classified employees are denied the right to use the unemployment insurance when a premium IS withheld from their wages. School districts are an employer just like Nike and Facebook. These business entities do have to provide unemployment to their employees when they are laid off, and the employer expense is figured into their annual budget.

Until 1979 unemployment in the state of Oregon was allowed and the cost of unemployment was part of the annual budget. Many school districts now pay a performance incentive to certified and administrative employees so allow them the opportunity to provide for their classified staff through unemployment benefits. Please revert to the past values and ethics that acknowledged classified employees as worthy of using the unemployment insurance they pay for instead of becoming Corporate Welfare recipients. Please support SB 470.