

April 6, 2015

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Committee on Workforce,

My name is Karen Creighton. I currently work part-time at the University of Oregon, where I've been a fitness instructor teaching credit classes to college students for fifteen years. I also work part-time for the City of Eugene, where I've been a "temporary" employee for twenty five years, teaching fitness to seniors and working as a behavioral specialist with preschoolers. Both jobs systematically limit hours to avoid paying health insurance to certain employees, mostly teachers and childcare workers, and both have done so for years.

The most frequent reasons my bosses give for not offering more hours or health insurance to part-time teaching staff are that there are too many of us and offering more hours and benefits would bankrupt the department, or if they give benefits to some people they'll have to lay off other people. They tell us this as they give administrators generous yearly raises.

Before the Affordable Care Act, many of us came to work sick to avoid losing wages and hours. We stayed sick much longer because we couldn't afford doctor visits and medications. There was a constant fear that one serious illness or accident could lead to a financial disaster of bankruptcy or even homelessness.

In the last year, many of us have qualified for the Oregon Health Plan. We've been getting healthier now that we can get appropriate treatment and medications. Work morale and performance is better because we have more energy and fewer worries. We are grateful to be getting health insurance after years of working without it.

What hasn't become healthier in the last year are the budgeting priorities for public sector jobs. The continued practice of limiting hours to avoid paying for employee health care is shifting the cost of the Affordable Care Act away from University of Oregon and City of Eugene budgets, onto the backs of the students and families we serve. It amounts to double-dipping. UO students pay money from federal and state grants and loans, in addition to the money they pay from their own pockets. Families using City of Eugene childcare pay with private funds, state subsidies, and scholarships from the City. When the UO and City shift the costs of the ACA to the state, our students and families pay for services a second time through their taxes, and all taxpayers end up paying for an invisible subsidy they didn't vote for.

SB 845 won't directly affect public employers like the University of Oregon or the City of Eugene, but it may send a message that even public employers need to be more responsible to their employees and to the taxpayers by structuring jobs and budgets in a way that will have the employer, not the taxpayer, paying for employee health insurance.

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