

To: Senate Committee on Education  
Date: April 13, 2015  
RE: SB 702

Chair Roblan, members of the committee,

My name is Melisa Crosby and I am about to “celebrate” my 25<sup>th</sup> year at Portland Community college with a significant drop in income and the loss of my health benefits for at least 12 months.

I am writing in support of SB 702. Ideally, I would be here in person but I currently work in three different programs, only one of which offers benefits such as health coverage, sick days, and personal days. With my other jobs, if I don’t show up, I don’t get paid. I will be in the classroom for 7 hours on the day this bill is to be discussed.

I began my career as an adult ESL teacher at Portland Community College in 1990. When I was originally hired, there were no benefits available for part time instructors: no health coverage, no sick days, no retirement. As PCC has increased its percentage of part time faculty, we have seen gains in benefits. We were eligible for PERS in 2000 and, after years of efforts, part time instructors were given access to health coverage in 2008.

While I never could afford to insure my children through my employer, even having health coverage for me was a great relief. While I never used this benefit extravagantly, it made a huge difference in my life knowing that I would not be financially destroyed by a hospitalization and that I wouldn’t have to scrape together the full cost of the medication, lab tests, and doctor visits required to monitor my chronic autoimmune disease and keep me healthy. Having employer provided health coverage has made a big difference in my life.

In recent years, the program in which I taught 12 hours a week (as many hours as permitted under PCC’s part timer rules) has been subject to drastic cuts. I am now down to 6 instructional hours a week at PCC which is the bare minimum to maintain eligibility for health insurance. Recently I learned that my one class would be canceled for the summer and if I don’t find a part time position next term, I will lose my eligibility for health coverage through PCC for the next academic year. Given the late notice I was given and the high demand for teaching positions at PCC, I have secured nothing for summer, despite my ongoing efforts and excellent work history.

Of course, my 6 hours a week at PCC isn’t enough to support my family. In the last two years I have worked at four different institutions, sometimes driving as many as 250 miles a week, just to stay above water. As a part timer I can be hired and fired at will and I have very little protection. I often have no assurance of employment beyond the next 8-10 weeks. I can’t

make plans as I have no job security. But the one thing I had was health coverage. And now I'm about to lose that after 25 years of excellent work for Portland Community College.

As I understand it, SB 702 would allow my additional part time teaching hours from Mt. Hood Community College (which doesn't offer health benefits to part timers) to be aggregated in order to more accurately reflect my actual work load and protect my health benefits. That would be a significant positive change in my life and the lives of hundred of other part timers state wide. As it is, many of us teach at least as much as our full time colleagues, but with those hours split over numerous programs, many part time instructors go without health coverage.

Adjunct faculty now do the bulk of teaching at Oregon's colleges and universities. While our numbers have increased significantly, our pay, benefits, and status have not kept pace. Our employers rely on the contingent faculty system, expecting us to give our utmost while making virtually no commitments to us. We work as hard as full time faculty, but with the additional stresses of uncertain job security, last minute schedule juggling, an inordinate amount of time spent commuting, lack of workspace, and the constant message that we are second class citizens in our academic communities. Making it easier to qualify for health benefits would be a small step forward addressing the imbalances of a very flawed system.