

Subject: HB 3508 - Unemployment Compensation for PT Faculty

Dear House Committee on Business and Labor:

I write you to express my very strong support for HB 3508, which would make part time post-secondary educators eligible for unemployment compensation when denied employment during the summer term.

This is a deeply personal issue to me: I am a part-time instructor at both Portland Community College and at Mount Hood Community College. My wife teaches part time at PCC, as well. I can tell you from personal experience: the summer is an annual period of tremendous hardship for us and our children. As a part time instructor, my wages during the academic year are already considerably lower than those earned by my full-time colleagues. This makes it quite difficult to save for the summer months, when our household income falls to nearly nothing (as it has done for each of the past two summers). The hardship we face during these times is compounded by the demeaning fact that (unlike almost any other worker in the nation) my part-time colleagues and I are specifically barred from collecting unemployment compensation.

After two straight summers with no income, my family's resources are simply broken. My wife has been forced to leave the teaching field she loves. If things do not improve for us, I may be soon forced to follow. We are excellent teachers, but the compensation problems faced by all part-time instructors are simply proving too much for us to bear as we struggle to provide for our young daughters.

I chose to be a community college instructor because I wanted to make a difference in my community. As an instructor, I find myself making that difference every day. Community colleges are an engine of social mobility in our state, at a time when social mobility is under real threat. Surely, it is a senseless practice to enshrine into law legalized discrimination that cherry-picks instructors like my wife and me and bars us from the safety net coverage the rest of our community enjoys?

I find it a tremendous and unforgivable irony that my students often attend school using money from Oregon's laudable re-training unemployment program, yet their teachers are cruelly barred from the unemployment system. Why would we build an unemployment system that encourages workers to return to school for re-training, yet also discourages good teachers from accepting jobs to instruct those same students? It's a system that makes no sense, and it's a system that we can correct, right now, by means of HB 3508.

With real emotion and conviction, I urge you to support and pass HB 3508. It is a critical change our community needs.

-Jason Stiffler
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