

To: House Committee on Business and Labor

Date: April 14, 2015

Re: HB 3508

Chair Holvey, members of the committee,

Good Morning, my name is Aleta Wright, and I am a part-time faculty member of the Computer Applications Department of Portland Community College. I have been employed with PCC for 13 years and have also taught for Clackamas Community College and Mt. Hood Community College from the years 1999-2003.

I urge your full support of HB 3508. Here's why:

At PCC I am a member of the 76%. That means that roughly 3 out of 4 instructors are part time or adjunct faculty members. We are the majority of teaching staff yet we live in constant fear and jeopardy of losing our classes.

In my department we have certain minimum class size requirements for a class to "go". I typically commit to teach a course at least 4 to 6 months prior to it starting. However, due to the fact that the state has decreased funding support for higher education, coupled with the decrease in enrollment and other outside factors beyond my control, I have come to the realization that it may no longer be feasible to remain an educator.

I teach Excel, I know how to run the numbers. When I did an analysis of my declining income, and declining teaching assignments this startling fact came to light: I work for a little over the minimum wage. Last year, 2014, my total income from teaching, after 13 years on the job, was \$27K which is roughly a 20% DECREASE in wages from 2013. The future does not look very bright.

As a single mother of a middle school child, I must provide a stable home and income base for the both of us. I have much more in common with a seasonal timber

worker, a retail sales person, or a barista shift worker than I do with a highly educated, well qualified, teaching professional.

When the woods are closed due to weather conditions, or the retail worker sees their hours and wages slashed, or the construction worker is laid off for lack of work – all of these job classifications allow for unemployment benefits with no questions asked.

There is a myth that has perpetuated for far too long about the glory or prestige of being a college “professor” but I testify here and say it is a lie. We are starving, invisible and exploited contingent workers. In essence I am no different than any of the seasonal shift workers I’ve mentioned here.

It is time to look at the facts, meet the people who live with the possibility of furlough every 12 weeks. Some of us barely get by, some of us do not turn on our heat because we can’t afford it. Some of us regularly use the Oregon Food Bank community pantry to shore up our home pantry. My child still needs to eat.

I have taught for the past 2 summers. I’ve been lucky to get 1 class which means I am lucky to take home \$250 per week. At that income level I do qualify for food stamps.

I won’t know until about 72 hours before classes start if I will have enough students on the roster for the class to go. This is a problem for students who have to scramble to find classes at the last minute because of cancellations. IT IS ALSO a problem for instructors who suddenly have zero classes and zero income. I will – in every sense of the word – be “laid off for lack of work” through no fault of my own. I should have the ability to receive unemployment benefits because each 12 week period is a separate and distinct employment period with no guarantees for the future.

Again, I urge you to strongly support HB 3508. Thank you for your time.