

March 11, 2019

Chair Wagner and Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

My name is David Rives and I am the President of the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon (AFT-Oregon). I am also a part time faculty member and previously taught courses at Portland Community College as an adjunct professor. AFT-Oregon represents approximately 15,000 workers in Oregon's higher education and K-12 system.

I'm testifying today in favor of Senate Bill 852, because I know firsthand what it's like to be a part-time community college instructor. I also know that in our higher education system in Oregon has continually turned away from full time tenure track faculty and turned toward heavily relying on graduate teachers, non-tenure, and part-time faculty.

According to the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), at 12 of 17 community colleges in Oregon, part time faculty make up 70% or more of the instructional staff. The challenge is that many part time faculty have to work at multiple institutions in order to cobble together a living. They are paid less than full time tenure track colleagues, they often lack an office space on campus, and they often spend their days driving from campus to campus.

Due to the rising cost of education, many of these faculty also carry significant student loan debt. In the Portland-area especially, they also find themselves struggling with housing affordability. In some cases, we have heard of part time faculty who are forced to rely on SNAP or local food banks in order to access nutritious food.

On top of those challenges, many part time faculty members in Oregon lack access to affordable health insurance. Despite teaching a full course load at multiple institutions, many part time faculty cannot even access their employer's insurance plans. When you consider the rapid rise in housing costs in many areas in Oregon, that only adds to the burden that a part time faculty member must carry with them in to the classroom each day.

If Oregon is truly going to achieve progress on student outcomes, meet goals like 40-40-20, and continue to educate and train our next generation of workers, we must be able to attract and retain talented people to the profession. No one chooses this line of work to get rich, but nor should dedicated teachers have to live in poverty or declare bankruptcy because of an unexpected illness or injury.

I strongly urge your support for Senate Bill 852.

Sincerely,

David Rives
President, AFT-Oregon