



## Oregon School Employees Association

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March 19, 2019

House Committee on Health Care  
Rep. Andrea Salinas, Chair  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Salinas and members of the committee:

Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) represents more than 22,000 workers in nearly all levels of public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, ESDs and community colleges. OSEA members perform many of the thankless tasks that keep Oregon public schools safe and functional for students, administrators and teachers throughout the school day.

In recognition of the committee's limited time to address even urgent issues, I am submitting the following short list of comments from my members on the issue of double coverage and opt-out incentives. Since the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 1067 in 2017, OSEA members have struggled with the idea that these critical, cost-saving benefit arrangements will soon disappear.

In addition to the individual impacts of losing these benefits, which in many cases are severe, I would highlight that in every local school district contract where we have negotiated an opt-out incentive, that benefit came at the cost of a pay increase or other benefit. Ripping away employee benefits without an opportunity to bargain is both unfair and extremely detrimental to the morale and trust of those employees.

Especially in light of the continuing high expectations that we have for school employees to "do more with less," we would **strongly urge this committee to pass House Bill (HB) 3075.**

Thank you for your attention,

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A selection of comments on losing double coverage and opt-out incentives under SB 1067 from OSEA members, representing over 22,000 educators statewide in Head Start, K-12 education and community colleges:

“We are lucky enough to have double coverage. My daughter has an illness that she has to have infusion treatments every seven weeks. Each infusion is \$57,000. **Because of double coverage she has been able to take the infusions. Without that it would be almost \$12,000 out of pocket every seven weeks.** We would not be able to do it.”

-- Laura Buckmaster, Lincoln County School District

“**We are unsure if me continuing to work full time is the correct thing to do if we lose that opt-out** because financially we depend on it for our children’s and our medical expenses.”

-- Leah Jones, Central School District

“My husband powered through having three jobs, to support his young and growing family, and going to college to obtain his teaching degree and then a master’s degree in athletic administration. During his first year teaching, our son, then 5, was diagnosed with a super rare bone disease, called Ollier's Disease or Enchondroma Matosis. ... SINCE MAY 2018, he has needed two new prosthetic legs, due to shrinkage. The average cost of a prosthetic leg is \$20,000. We did the opt-out coverage this year (it was the first year Nyssa School District has allowed their married staff to combine caps) and because of that I was able to pay our portion of the second prosthetic leg with our HSA card. In the past, we have been buried under medical expenses. We have met our maximum out of pocket nearly every year since his diagnosis. In 2017, when we were nearly unable to make ends meet, I applied for a job at the school district my husband teaches at and got the job, **it was a God send because it meant we could double cover Michael.** ... We are nearly out of debt, our middle daughter got braces and the rest of us can go to the doctor if we are sick. Our annual combined income is under \$60,000 a year. ... We do not qualify for any help for Michael, we have applied for Medicaid and been denied. ... My husband and I have multiple jobs to make ends meet. I clean office buildings on the weekends for grocery money. My husband teaches, has a master’s degree, coaches two sports, is the student council advisor and teaches summer school. He loves teaching and coaching but they also bring in extra duty stipends that help us pay medical expenses. If they take the ability for us to double cover our son or the opt-out option away, once again we will be buried under medical expenses. We should as district and state employees be able to cover our children. **I make \$12.80 an hour. When hired, they explained to me that my pay was so low because of the benefits I am offered.** If this passes I will not be paid fairly for the work I do and I will not be allowed to cover my medically complex child with my benefits I earn as a Nyssa School District employee.”

-- Sara Sapp, Nyssa School District

“My husband has worked in the maintenance department at Glide School District for nearly six years. After adding two minor members to our family, we decided that a change in employment for me would be necessary to increase our monthly income. One of the major considerations for this



decision was the fact that I could opt-out of the insurance which would increase our yearly income by \$4320. By losing this additional income, it likely will become necessary for me to seek employment elsewhere. In addition, **it is probable that our district will need to cut wages, hours or positions to make up for the additional expenses that will be incurred by having to provide insurance coverage for many more employees. This could put my husband's position in jeopardy.** This is a poor scenario for our family, our district and our community and I urge our legislators to pass HB 3075 and reinstate full opt-out incentives to employees that are double covered.”

-- Jan Laroue, Glide School District

“This will incredibly affect my family of five. I will no longer be able to opt-out of our OEBC plan in order to receive the opt-out payment. This will, in turn, affect my monthly take home pay. **I will be earning over \$400/month less than I have been for over four years.**”

-- Calli Gulick, Baker School District

“I opt-out of the health benefits because it doesn't help us to have double coverage using the same health insurance. However, I receive approximately \$536 per month for nine months as an opt-out option which I believe saves more money for my school district. That is a large amount of funds for my family. We have depended on this money to pay for unforeseen happenings, unexpected bills and savings. **This opt-out money is 19 percent of my paycheck.**”

-- Zora Dickerson, St. Helens School District

“I work for a small school district, and so does my husband. We depend on the opt-out as a part of our income. We realize also **what it would cost the district if they had to pay for both of us individually for insurance purposes.** There are about eight couples at least that would be harmed if we lost this!”

-- Yvonne Krause, Clatskanie School District

“As the secretary of the Alliance Academy, I work part time (4 hours a day) Monday through Friday, so 20 hours a week. I have been taking the opt-out option since I was hired because without it I would not be able to afford to do this job part time. Just that little bit of extra monthly makes this possible for my family. If they get rid of that opt-out option **I will have to work more hours and the district does not want to add hours for this position so I will have to go and find a different job.** My husband works shift work full time and this job allows me to be home with the kids when they are out of school. ... On another note, allowing employees to take the opt-out option helps our district and all school districts save money by not having to pay health care. Most people know that school districts need to save money where ever they can. Getting rid of the opt-out option doesn't only hurt school districts but also some families.”

-- Suzanne Talbott, Yamhill-Carlton School District

“My husband and I both work for Lincoln County Schools. ... Our health insurance became very important to us in 2017 when I was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive colon cancer. I went



through six months of chemo and after six months of remission, the cancer returned and I completed a second six months of chemotherapy. I am about to start my first round of radiation. We have only missed work for surgery and infusion days. I regularly worked with a chemo pump attached to my body. We are both very devoted to our students and passionate about what we do. **The high deductible plan has met our needs because my husband is able to opt-out and use his benefit to pay for the deductible. If we lost those funds, it would be difficult to continue working here.** As a person living with cancer, I know I will continue to need our medical insurance to its fullest extent. And while my income is adequate, my husband's is not. He has students working at fast food places earning more than he does. The benefits included in his contract have made it possible for us to continue here.”

-- Nikki and Zach Wolff, Lincoln County School District

“My husband and I ... both work for and have insurance through the same school district.... Since the district doesn't have to pay for two medicals and two dentals, they split the difference of unused insurance stipend with us — half goes into our HSA account until it's maxed out, and they keep the other half. **It would crush us to have that change — we depend on the amount that they put into our HSA to make such a high-deductible plan doable.**”

-- Deni Goodwin, Phoenix-Talent School District

“When I heard that the benefits were changing I thought we would be okay, **but I will end up paying the district to work next year.** Because not only do I lose my \$450 reimbursement but I will be required to pay for health insurance even though my family is already paying a premium.”

-- Tessa O'Malley, Warrenton School District

“**Without the ability to opt-out and receive the compensation it is not financially feasible for me to remain in this position.** Besides my role during school hours I am a coach with the fall and spring sports programs. If I find employment elsewhere it is unlikely I will have the flexibility of schedule to continue coaching which would be a tremendous loss to myself personally and to our students.”

-- Steve Delgado, Coos Bay Public Schools

“We are unsure how we will be able to keep up with medical bills if one of us gets hurt or really sick without this option. We both work hard and feel like it is unfair for us both not to get the benefits that everyone else gets just because we work in the same type of atmosphere. **We will be losing over \$700 a month** if the current policies stay in place. That is a huge amount of money over the span of one year. We are really hoping that HB 3075 goes through, so we can continue our current coverage.”

-- Rebecca Robison, Hermiston School District

“I utilize and rely on double coverage to help ensure I have the coverage necessary for all of my health needs. **Having insurance that is continually costing us more and providing less coverage is making it necessary to have double coverage to lower the out of pocket from costly surgeries**



**and emergencies.** Medical debts have ruined so many middle-class lives due to high out of pocket costs. Also, I do not have adequate savings to cover these costs so we end up in debt that leads to more struggles financially.”

-- Lynn Hollenbeck, Gresham-Barlow School District

“My husband has progressive MS. He will be starting a new treatment. His treatments are roughly \$66,000 a year. With our double coverage, we anticipate our out-of-pocket to be around \$1000. Without double coverage, his insurance will pick up 85 percent and we will need to come up with the rest. That is a huge financial burden! Why are we being discriminated against? **Why am I being forced to look for a different job so I can actually cover my husband?** I can work at Walmart or McDonalds and hold double coverage, but I like my job of more than 10 years.”

-- Minda Dreiling, North Santiam School District

“Opt-out incentives are a very important part of my family's financial wellbeing. My husband works for the school district as well and our health insurance includes an HSA account, the opt-out incentive helps pay for a portion of our personal HSA distribution as well as makes up for not being a 12 month employee. **Since we are not allowed to apply for unemployment benefits during the summer months the extra opt-out money helps make up for the hours lost during this time.** Losing this little bit of extra money each month would greatly impact us.”

-- Tausha Moran, La Grande School District

"This has personally been a financial lifesaver for our family. But beyond the financial implications, it's only FAIR. ... **My husband and I have been loyal employees for over two decades. We should both be able to enjoy the benefits of coverage for our entire family.** We are separate employees, we should enjoy separate benefits!"

-- Karyn Dougherty, Gresham-Barlow School District

