

Marta Kunecka  
HD 16  
Chemeketa Community College/Linn Benton Community College/Oregon State University

Chair Doherty and the House Committee on Education:

My name is Marta Kunecka. I work as an adjunct philosophy professor at Oregon State University, Chemeketa Community College, and Linn Benton Community College both in Albany and in the Benton Center in Corvallis. I hold a PhD in philosophy and have over a decade of experience as an educator in Oregon and abroad.

I came to the United States ten years ago to complete my doctoral research and I've worked in education in Oregon ever since. In the meantime, I have become a single parent and a homeowner, and I decided to make this enchanting and peaceful state home for me and for my daughter, a home where she will acquire her own education over the years. Because of this decision and because the state has few tenure-track positions available, I'm confined to working as an adjunct professor. I love teaching, and I'm fortunate to teach in Oregon. But the system currently in place presents several big challenges, one of them being the health care issue.

At this time, I do not receive health-insurance benefits like other full-time faculty even though between all of my positions I work more than full time (1.5 – 1.75 full-time equivalent each term). My current yearly income puts me in the gap between making too much money to qualify for state insurance and yet not making enough to cover my health insurance costs (with increasing premiums each year) out of my own pocket.

Each day, after dropping my daughter off to school, I commute back and forth among four different campuses. The time I spend commuting every week amounts to another .25 FTE that I'm not paid for. I often ask myself whether the extra effort is worth it, and I always come to the same conclusion: It is worth it because I'm educating young people.

I have acquaintances who receive state subsidies including full health care coverage while not working the long hours that I do. They work in industries other than education, which do not require constant availability and attention, and in positions that do not address the intellectual needs of young Oregonians. Hearing these stories, I'm often confronted with the thought of either leaving academia for an alternate field or of working less in order to ensure more security for myself and my daughter, that is, contributing less while receiving more state benefits.

But this is not a valid option for me. Teaching is my passion. I want to continue teaching and contributing to the betterment of our communities. I'm a committed and valued professor, and I care deeply about increasing philosophical awareness and reinforcing critical thinking skills for young Oregonians, to ensure that those who graduate from our colleges are informed, educated and equipped to participate in the commercial, civic and political life of the state.

But the fact remains: none of my workplaces offer the health-care benefits I need. I am asking you to vote "yes" on House Bill 4146.