

Chair Doherty and members of the House Committee on Education:

My name is Kim Colantino. I currently am a full-time faculty member in the English department at Chemeketa Community College, and previously served as the English program chair, which gave me a unique window into the struggles faced by nearly all of our part-time faculty members around lack of healthcare coverage.

Our program employs about 50 part-time instructors and only 17 full-time instructors, which means about 75 percent of our faculty have part-time status. I say “status,” because a significant majority of those instructors work at other Oregon system campuses to patch together full-time employment. I also understand the struggle because 10 years ago, I was first hired at Chemeketa Community College as a part-time instructor. I loved the position, but was only able to do the job because I was married to someone who had benefits that covered me, too.

Shortly after starting my career at Chemeketa, I became pregnant with our first son. He had immediate health concerns at birth and was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, necessitating a lot of medical care. We felt pinned down as a family – although my husband wanted to stay home with him, he absolutely had to be the one to stay working. If he had lost his job, there was no possibility I’d be able to pick up enough classes to make up for that medical care for our child.

That was 10 years ago, and nothing has really changed. While serving as Program Chair, one of the instructors I recommended for hire was a veteran of the Middle East conflicts, had an almost-complete Ph.D. with years of teaching experience, and perhaps most importantly, had a huge heart for community college students. He and his wife had just relocated to Oregon with their one-year-old child.

About a year into teaching for us, this faculty member told me he had taken up two other part-time jobs, specifically so he could afford health coverage. Even with the insurance exchange, he was paying about \$735 a month, out-of-pocket. After about two-years successfully serving our students, this instructor called me expressing great sadness over having to quit teaching altogether. His wife was pregnant with their second child, and he had to make a real salary. He needed healthcare. Full-time instructors within the Oregon system shouldn’t find themselves in this situation.

This story is common. At Chemeketa, I’ve noticed very few part-time instructors remain with us more than 2-3 years. In fact, the ones who stay the longest either have spouses who provide their health coverage or are young enough and dependent-less enough to eke by, hoping they don’t experience a sudden illness or accident. We routinely lose the instructors who don’t fit those narrow life-stage parameters. Please, help our students to have instructors with higher morale because it shows in the classroom. Please help our students to have instructors who can grade their work on-time, comment on it thoughtfully, and prepare engaging lessons.

These things can't happen when our teachers work two, three, and sometimes four jobs trying to pay for healthcare, so please vote "yes" on HB 4146.