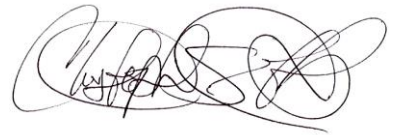


FROM THE DESK OF:
Sen. Chris Gorsek



April 7, 2021

Education Advocates Ask You To Support SB 496A Unemployment Benefits for Certain School Employees

Oregon state law currently restricts most school employees' Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefit eligibility by requiring adjudication for "reasonable assurance" of a return to work after summer break. This restriction leads to a mountain of work for OED staff. More importantly, this restriction even leads to some employees who typically work year-round being denied UI benefits when furloughed or laid off for the summer – as happened during the 2020 pandemic.

SB 496A removes the confusing "reasonable assurance" test for:

Early Learning and Early Intervention Employees: *Few Head Start programs are run by "educational institutions" as defined in UI law. However, those that are employees of an educational institution, whose wages aren't high to start with, can have UI benefits denied when the same rules don't apply to other Head Start programs. Similarly, early intervention programs run by Education Service Districts are treated differently if the workers deliver services in a K-12 school instead of an ESD facility. SB 496A ensures all these workers are treated the same.*

School Food Service Employees: *Food service workers are the lowest paid school employees, meaning their UI benefits are very modest. To have those benefits slowed or blocked – during the 2020 pandemic – over "reasonable assurance" is unconscionable. SB 496A makes them subject to exactly the same rules as any non-school employee laid off for the summer – no longer facing adjudication, uncertainty, and likely a denial of benefits just because they work for an educational institution.*

It should be noted that this bill doesn't change "reasonable assurance" for other education workers and it doesn't change any of the core eligibility requirements that apply to all unemployment claimants – chief among them that you must be "able to work, available to work, and actively seeking work" in order to receive benefits.

This is an important change for early learning and food service employees in response to serious UI eligibility problems that were highlighted in 2020. **We urge your support in removing restrictions that affect their UI benefit eligibility.**

