

Testimony on SB 496 A
House Business and Labor Committee
April 26, 2021

Chair Holvey and members of the committee, my name is Karen Smith, and I am the Senior Policy Advisor and General Counsel for the Oregon Community College Association. On behalf of Oregon's 17 community colleges, I appreciate the opportunity to submit these written comments in opposition to SB 496 A.

We understand the impact delayed access to unemployment insurance (UI) benefits has had on some education employees during the COVID-19 pandemic as the Employment Department has to review each case to determine eligibility due to the restrictions on education employees' eligibility in federal law. We know that there are fairness issues that arise due to the federal law related to unemployment insurance for employees who work in educational settings and their lack of eligibility during breaks between academic terms and summer. We have supported fixes to the system in the past to ensure that those who are eligible for UI receive benefits in a timely manner. These have included narrowly crafted exemptions to ensure that community college employees who are eligible are able to access UI benefits to which they are entitled. We appreciate Mr. Estabrook's willingness to try to work with us on this bill. Unfortunately, we are not able to support the bill as passed by the Senate.

OCCA has concerns about the proposed change to unemployment insurance eligibility for non-instructional school food services staff and employees of Federal Head Start Programs during breaks between academic terms. In particular, we would like to share our concerns about the impact of SB 496 A on community college Head Start and Early Childhood Centers, and the families they serve.

We understand the intent behind the bill is to treat non-professional employees who provide early intervention and pre-K services and support for those services the same as those employees who are employed outside of educational institution settings, with Mt Hood Community College's (MHCC) head start program as the primary focus of the bill. Certainly, MHCC's early childhood program is the largest and will feel the greatest impact if this bill passes. However, with the amendment adopted by the Senate and the broadening of the definition to include any employees who provide early-intervention or pre-K services, we believe there will also be an impact on a handful of other Early Childhood Centers located at community colleges around the state.

While there are no other community colleges that run federal head start programs as the primary grantee, several contract with these programs and allow them to use facilities on their campuses, and a number operate early childhood centers in concert with these programs and college early childhood degree programs. These centers provide important on campus clinical lab settings for community college students enrolled in early childhood degree programs. As such they employ a handful of both instructional and non-instructional employees in their programs. Under SB 496 A we believe these non-instructional staff who are providing early intervention and pre-K services would be eligible for UI during

summer and breaks between terms. This will result in additional and unanticipated costs to the employing colleges.

MHCC's program is much larger as they are the primary grantee for the federal head start program that serves families throughout most of the MHCC district. MHCC has been the grantee for 40 years and their grant funded program is a significant benefit to the community. The program also serves as an educational lab for some of the college's early childhood program students like the other community colleges' centers mentioned above, and it also provides free childcare for some MHCC students with the most financial need. There is no other provider in the area that has the capacity to serve all of East Multnomah County the way MHCC's program does.

MHCC's Head Start program is completely grant-funded on a per child basis. It currently employs over 300 full and part-time employees including 65 teachers and non-instructional employees who are employed on a 9-month, academic year basis (fall, winter, and spring terms.) Because the program is funded on a per child basis this means that any increase in cost will lead to a reduction in services to the families served by this program.

Finally, most community colleges are direct reimbursing employers; meaning that they must reimburse the UI trust fund for the cost of any UI benefits paid. Any change in unemployment insurance eligibility for non-professional employees at educational institutions, including community colleges, will have a direct fiscal impact on college operations. Colleges have not budgeted for additional costs that might result if SB 496 A is passed. This direct fiscal impact would be detrimental to their programs and the families they serve.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.