



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Dembrow
Vice-Chair Thomsen
Members of the Senate Education Committee

FR: Catie Theisen, OR AFL-CIO

RE: SB 551 Support

February 22, 2021

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. As such, we believe that every worker in Oregon deserves quality, affordable health care access.

However, faculty and researchers working part time at our public universities and community colleges are currently forced to bear 100% of their healthcare costs. Unless an adjunct instructor teaches at least half-time at a specific school (even if they teach at schools within the same “system”), they are not provided affordable or available health care. Many of these part-time/adjunct faculty at Oregon’s community colleges and public universities teach enough total hours that they should qualify for health care coverage under current requirements, but the fact that they teach at multiple institutions disallows them from coverage, even though their colleagues that teach the same amount (or less) at one institution receive coverage.

Consequently, sometimes these workers are purposefully kept at part-time and adjunct positions. These faculty are professional educators, who often must teach at multiple schools to pay their bills. These often low-wage and part-time positions, combined with the lack of affordable health care can affect our state’s ability to recruit and retain high-quality educators and contributes to structural inequities in higher-ed and Oregon at large.

SB 551 helps solve this by building off the current system to provide access to health care coverage under OEGB for part-time faculty who teach more than a half-time course load, whether at one institution or multiple. It implements a floor of 90/10 cost share for part-time employee healthcare benefits. The program will be administered by OEGB at no cost or administrative burden to the colleges and universities.

An entire generation of students at Oregon’s eight public universities have been taught more by adjunct instruction than by permanent faculty. It’s time that those educators were able to get the health care they need and deserve. And as we think about the upstream system costs for un or underinsured Oregonians -- particularly during a global pandemic -- this bill should be both a moral and practical imperative. For the sake of our healthcare system, our communities, and future students, we encourage your support of SB 551.