



Date: February 2, 2021
To: Senate Labor and Business, Chair Riley and Members
From: Jared Mason-Gere, Oregon Education Association Government Relations
RE: *Support for SB 496*

The Oregon Education Association, representing 41,000 member educators across the state urges passage of SB 496.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed many weaknesses in state statutes designed to protect working people across Oregon. The inability to respond properly to the spate of layoffs and unemployment claims throughout the past year is one key exhibit in the case for improved unemployment benefits and clarity in the law to ensure that all eligible workers can get the benefits they need in dire economic times such as these.

School employees, unlike any other class of worker in Oregon must have their unemployment insurance claims adjudicated by the Oregon Employment Department. Despite these workers meeting all other criteria to qualify for unemployment benefits, this process has led to denial of benefits for school workers who had “reasonable assurance” of work after summer break. Even employees who typically work year-round can be denied benefits if a reduction in force occurs in the summer month. A number of educators have experienced this hardship during the Covid-19 pandemic.

SB 496 removes the unfair restriction on unemployment eligibility for school employees in Head Start programs and food service. It makes them subject to exactly the same rules as any non-school employee laid off for the summer, but no longer facing adjudication, uncertainty, and likely denial of benefits just because they work for an educational institution.

We urge your support.