

February 14, 2023

Senate Committee on Education

Chair Michael Dembrow

RE SB 283-3

Susan Hardy

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On behalf of OSEA, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 283-3. I have spent most of my life working in public education. Currently, there are no classified workers on any State boards or commissions that shape education. SB 283-3 creates an opportunity for classified workers to have a seat at the table for the ongoing taskforce charged with deeper examination of pay equity and work quality. This inclusion is important in light of the statistics showing the ratio of classified staff to licensed staff in elementary schools is 7to1.

In addressing the workforce shortage in K-12 education, I know it is not totally realistic to blame everything we don't agree with on COVID-19, but in many ways I think the pandemic did have an impact on all workers, but the pandemic specifically impacted classified education workers. During the pandemic, classified workers in our schools were asked to take on a bigger workload due to inadequate staffing. Now that the pandemic has passed, many of those workers are still carrying that heavier workload, without additional pay due to what is now explained as a shortage of workers.

Improving working conditions through Just Cause, additional pay through the differential and minimum daily hours will help recruit diverse educators and retain those we already have. This will also create a better learning environment for our students.

I am retired but at one time I worked for eight years for a state agency. In hiring, they would tell potential employees that they were so good to their employees that they didn't need a union. When I left this agency, it was to get married and move to Eugene. Just before my resignation was final, the agency, operating throughout the state, terminated a majority of their employees in several locations all at one time, only to hire back a few of those and replace the rest. That was my first lesson in what it means to be an "at will" employee and the meaning of Just Cause. Classified workers' wages are sometimes barely above minimum wage and it is horrific that these workers do not have even Just Cause. Universally, every worker should have the protection of Just Cause, but especially those who are put in the challenging position of supporting all our students every day.

And finally, economic security for educators is a smart investment! As a single adult, I worked numerous jobs at one time to be able to support myself. During the last 13 years of my career, I worked as a Family Advocate for Head Start and worked a minimum of two additional jobs at the same time. A broadly available pay differential for educators will help, but many classified educators will also be helped by a minimum five hour requirement. This will increase the predictability of their schedules and their pay, as well as working to reduce the need to work extra jobs.

The five hour a day shift also increases access to health insurance and other benefits to employees scheduled for three and a half hours or less.

These investments will allow Oregon classified educators to bring stronger support to our students every day.

Sincerely,

Susan Hardy

Retired Oregon School Employees