

March 16th, 2023

TO: Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education

RE: Support of SB 489

Thank you for hearing this bill and the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Jaime Rodriguez, and I am the elected President of the American Federation of Teachers – Oregon based in Portland, OR. Our labor federation represents over 18,000 members across the education workforce of Oregon. AFT-Oregon strongly encourages your support of SB 489 as a needed solution to support classified school employees in the public education system.

This bill will eliminate an unfair barrier to accessing unemployment insurance for classified staff who face a “reasonable assurance test.” Prior sessions have made headway on eliminating this extra frustrating step for education workers trying to access UI benefits in 2019 (HB 2660) and 2021 (SB 496). SB 489 would finish this task and eliminate this barrier for the remaining subset of workers.

Giving school employees equal access to UI is necessary and urgent. All Oregonians need to be taken care of and able to feed their families, and this includes during school breaks. This will not cost school districts very much, but more importantly, low-wage workers such as educational assistants should not be left without support. It is good policy and a good moral precedent already set by the Oregon Legislature.

This restriction is unique to employees of public educational institutions, and we believe workers such as K-12 bus drivers deserve the same UI rights and access as city bus drivers. The largest group who is affected and that this bill supports are educational assistants, including health and special education assistants, bus drivers, and secretaries. These are critical and important members of our schools. They perform essential work. Having an additional barrier to UI access cannot wait any longer, especially after we have collectively called these employees “heroes” throughout the pandemic and the staffing crisis. This bill will ensure we treat these employees like the professionals they are.

For the sake of our union members and their families, and in solidarity with education workers across the state, AFT-Oregon urges your support on SB 489.

Thank you for your time. Sincerely,



Jaime Rodriguez
President
American Federation of Teachers - Oregon