



Oregon School Employees Association

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Senate Committee on Education
Sen. Michael Dembrow, chair

Dear Chair Dembrow and committee members:

The Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) represents about 23,000 workers in nearly all levels of public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, ESDs, community colleges and special districts. OSEA members perform many of the essential tasks that keep Oregon public schools safe and functional for students, administrators and teachers.

OSEA is pleased to have partnered with the Legislature in recent sessions to exempt certain classifications of workers from the unfair and complicated reasonable assurance test that's denying school employees unemployment insurance (UI) benefits in the summer even if they are actively seeking work and follow all the rules. Legislators have agreed that it's both unfair and unrealistic to ask school employees to stretch nine or 10 months of inadequate wages over a year or to always have some other income, even if they're actively seeking work like other UI claimants.

Many of you have heard from school employees and our allies previously that the current situation – an additional restriction that applies solely to public education workers – is both confusing in structure and unfair in the outcomes it generates. I would direct your attention to the graphic we've enclosed with this testimony, showing the extra barrier – the extra journey – that school employees are asked to do, just to qualify for the small benefit amounts that their inadequate wages should qualify them for. Senate Bill (SB) 489 eliminates the extra journey for education workers, which also simplifies the process for employers and saves time and effort for the Oregon Employment Department (OED) as well.

We understand from review by OED that Oregon is within its authority under federal law to eliminate the reasonable assurance test. We know this will help workers, as you've heard from other witnesses, and strongly believe it's all-around good policy for the state. It also will not present a significant cost to school districts, because many school employees, even without this extra barrier in their way, are still not going to be filing for UI benefits unless they really need them. The benefits formula for UI doesn't make much of a benefit available to low-income workers like those in public education but having that benefit as some protection against economic hardship or outright disaster is a very big deal for our workers.

OSEA strongly urges this committee to pass SB 489 and provide equal access to UI benefits for our classified education workers.

Thank you for your attention,

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