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# A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

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TO: Chair Riley  
Vice-Chair Hansell  
Members of the Senate Labor and Business committee

FR: Catie Theisen, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: SB 496 Support

March 16, 2021

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process.

The Oregon AFL-CIO strongly supports SB 496 and the right for all workers to efficiently access unemployment benefits when they're unable to work. It is especially pressing that the low-wage workers – disproportionately women, disproportionately people of color, often caregivers to children or other family members – who work in our schools and early learning programs not face *additional barriers* to accessing unemployment benefits, on top of what every other Oregon worker faces.

This bill specifically responds to three of the most inequitable effects of the current system. These were problems before 2020, but we have now seen workers be denied unemployment benefits *even during a pandemic*, when none of us knew what the future would hold. And, even worse in some cases, we've seen workers *receive* benefits, only to later find out they were denied and were expected to repay those benefits. For working families, the system is clearly broken.

Finally, let me note that the workers who will be helped by this bill are not only overwhelmingly women and people of color – they are workers who often already must work additional jobs to survive. Denying unemployment benefits to them because they're working for an educational institution is to push workers already on the margin even farther to the side. Instead of allowing that to continue, you can pass this bill and protect unemployment access for some of Oregon's most essential workers.