

January 30, 2021  
Senate Committee on Labor and Business

Dear Chair Riley and members of the Committee;

I work as a Food Service employee in the 4j School District in Eugene. I am writing in support of SB 496. In short, anything that helps and that shows respect for my colleagues is badly needed.

As you know, at the beginning of the pandemic Food Service workers were identified as essential workers. It is my opinion that our schools generally treat food and nutrition as, at best, a secondary priority. We are told it is important, but in reality it is treated much differently. Suddenly we were "everyday heroes." Then, almost immediately, more than half the employees in my department had our hours cut. Our overall staff numbers have been cut as well. Just as in 2009, I am confident this is just the beginning of many cuts to come.

While this bill does not directly address those types of cuts, it does show respect through action, instead of just with words. It treats our food service workers more respectfully and would genuinely help workers as well as the families we serve. Cuts in hours and cuts in positions are a sign. We, along with everyone, continue to work not knowing what the future looks like. Any action that provides more stability makes words like "furlough" a little less potentially catastrophic.

One of my colleagues has three children. She works a second part time job. When the pandemic hit we were all encouraged to file for available unemployment programs that pertained to furlough days in the past school year. She did so with complete honesty, and did receive benefits. Last week she received a notice from the state that some of those benefits should not have been approved, and was told that she needed to return more than a thousand dollars. She is not feeling very heroic right now. This is a hardship for her family. She also told me she feels discouraged. Two steps forward, and at least three steps back. This is not just financially. Financial instability is a fact of life for millions of workers. She just feels misled by the confusion of programs.

If laws and programs are so confusing that even the state doesn't understand it's own programs, then it seems plain that those laws could use some attention.

Thank you for your attention through SB 496. It demonstrates respect, appreciation, and humanity through action.

Sincerely,

Ray Martin