

February 22, 2021  
Senate Committee on Education

I am writing **in support of Senate Bill 551**.

I have been teaching as a part-time faculty member at Central Oregon Community College and Oregon State University-Cascades for the past four years. I regularly teach between 33 and 40 credit hours of classes per academic year, which is the equivalent of 3-4 classes a term and at times more. For some perspective, full-time faculty at these institutions teach an average of 35 credit hours. Despite working at least three-quarter time as a public service educator, my health insurance coverage is regularly uncertain. At times I may have health coverage for part of the year; at other times this is not available. Sometimes I do not find out that I will lose coverage until two weeks before I do. As of right now I am not offered health insurance through my work and will likely not receive it next year.

In the previous years I have had to switch health insurance providers up to four times a year because of policies that restrict coverage. This makes it difficult to plan for health costs with variable premiums, co-pays, and deductibles. Worse yet, it makes it very challenging to see the same health care providers who suddenly are labelled as “out-of-network.” When facing any form of illness or injury it is important to be able to receive follow up care from one’s provider to prevent further health issues. Educators need to have reliable coverage to ensure that they will be able to continue working well.

My experience is representative of many other part-time faculty members’ experiences. Institutions of higher education are increasingly switching over to a model of education that draws heavily on part-time instructors to teach their courses. Current policies enable part-time faculty to often teach two courses a term, which equates to 0.48 FTE – placing us just below the line to receive benefits. When working at two state institutions we end up working full-time (for significantly less pay) and despite working 0.96 FTE between two institutions we currently do not qualify for state health coverage.

Senate Bill 551 recognizes the important role that part-time faculty members play in our state supported institutions and allows for our teachers to do their jobs. Previous bills have been passed that recognize the rising number of faculty that work in multiple institutions and have offered them membership in the Public Employees Retirement System. SB 551 is another step in the right direction – this time ensuring that our faculty can have access to affordable health care to be able to teach within an educational system that increasingly draws on part-time faculty support.

Thank you,  
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