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STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 9, 2023

The Honorable Julie Fahey
Oregon House of Representatives
Committee on Rules

Ref: House Bill 2888

Chair Fahey:

I write this letter in support of House Bill 2888 (HB 2888). As a fifth-term “citizen legislator” who has juggled the often-challenging requirements of a full-time teaching job at Chemeketa Community College and the duties inherent to faithful service in the Oregon House of Representatives – I can tell you that this measure is desperately needed.

Over the past five terms, I have generally withheld comments on issues impacting members of the Oregon Legislature. Our function is to serve our nation, state, and communities – not ourselves. I have not, and shall not, publicly comment on legislative benefits, compensation, or retirement matters. When we stand for election, we are obligated to do so with an understanding of the risks and rewards of service. Accordingly, I try to manage the respective workloads without drawing attention to the very real obstacles the few of us who must have an outside source of income for basic necessities must overcome.

I am breaking that policy on this specific measure because the world has changed – employers are becoming far less willing to accommodate, perhaps more willing to push employees who concurrently serve as legislators away indirectly. While I have anecdotal evidence of this happening, I will focus most of my testimony on my own situation – a situation that I know to be true.

In the beginning of my tenure in the Oregon House of Representatives, my employer was a good partner. Leadership made accommodations in terms of course scheduling as well as transitioning my “summer” to Winter Term because of the annual Legislative work in February. That said, over the past couple of years, a change in administration has made decisions that will soon end many of the accommodations previously put into place. If the administration currently implements changes in the discussion, I will need to consider seeking alternative employment or retiring from legislative service.

Accommodating the requirements of legislative service has apparently become more burdensome. Although nothing actionable has been communicated, it feels as if the administration seeks to meet the letter of the law, if not its spirit. This makes serving in the modern Legislative Assembly far more challenging, far more difficult, and far more frustrating than it needs to be. Taken together, it appears as if at least some in the administration would prefer to create an environment that makes departing more palatable than remaining.

While I do not claim retribution, I can say with some certainty that the current administration would prefer an employee who was not serving in the Legislature.

Today we have annual sessions with non-stop work in the brief “Interim” periods between. On top of the formal legislative duties, constituent services and outreach to stakeholders for the coming session has become itself a nearly full-time job – if done well. We must strengthen existing protections as well as expand them effectively to cover the realistic spectrum and timeframe of legitimate legislative activities. If we fail to do this, we will lose even more “citizen legislators,” and with that loss of perspective, likely devolve into a body mostly comprised of the retired and the wealthy.

In closing, I recognize the burdens employers of legislators must endure. Truth be told, there may be little quantifiable benefit for the company when an employee serves in the Oregon Legislature. On the other hand, organizations, both private as well as public, do benefit from a legislative body comprised of people with experience in the workplace. In the end, we may not be able to protect every legislator from an employer who knowingly seeks to make the workspace untenable, but we can – and we must – do what we can to provide at least a basic protection for the time required to serve our people and place.

I strongly urge immediate passage of HB 2888 in the hopes of preserving what remains of our citizen legislature.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. H. C.', written in a cursive style.

Cc: Representative Vikki Breeze-Iverson, Vice-Chair
Representative Jason Kropf, Vice-Chair