



## **STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF SB 489**

**To: Chair Dembrow, Senate Committee on Education**  
**From: United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555**  
**3/16/23**

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on SB 489, which would address the current public defense crisis in Oregon. UFCW Local 555 is the largest private sector labor union in Oregon. Our members come from a number of industries, including grocery, retail, food processing, manufacturing, and healthcare. We are a diverse group of workers who take pride in acting as a strong collective voice for working people.

We are proud to stand in solidarity with OSEA to support SB 489, which would eliminate restrictions on unemployment benefits for certain education employees. For too long, underfunded public school districts have leaned on the reasonable assurance test as a get-out-of-jail-free card to avoid paying for UI benefits for school employees during breaks – including during the pandemic shutdown of 2020.

Our members, and indeed all private sector workers and all other public employees, can claim UI benefits as soon as they are out of work, as long as they meet all the standard requirements for UI benefits. The only workers who are excluded from these basic protections are certain public education workers– including education assistants, bus drivers, and secretaries.

Especially as schools struggle to recruit and retain good employees, with students showing significant additional needs for support right now, we can't wait for a "convenient" time to treat public education workers like the professionals we've always asked them to be. They are the staff that are bearing the brunt of short-staffing and more numerous and more severe student needs and challenging behaviors in our schools post-pandemic.

Denying these workers unemployment benefits forces them to bear the brunt of financial insecurity during summer breaks, and makes it extremely difficult for workers to leave their jobs if they need to seek employment elsewhere. Unemployment insurance is a minor cost for employers that has a tremendous impact on the individual.

**UNITED FOOD & COMMERCIAL WORKERS LOCAL 555**

7095 SW Sandburg Street • PO Box 23555 Tigard, Oregon 97281-3555 • Office: 503-684-2822 • Fax: 503-620-3816 • [ufcw555.org](http://ufcw555.org)



Our members rely on public school staff to support their children, and support the academic, mental, emotional, social, behavioral, physical, and communication needs of all Oregon's students. Investing in this workforce, and providing them the tools they need to succeed and thrive, is vital not only for these workers, but for all Oregonians.

We strongly urge your support.

Madison Walters,  
Political Liaison,  
UFCW Local 555

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