



3/16/23

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, members of the committee, thank you for having me today to talk about HB 2703. For the record, my name is Kyndall Mason, and I work for the Oregon Education Association. We represent more than 41,000 educators, classified staff, and specialists in Oregon's public K-12 and Community College systems.

I am here today to talk about our support for SB 489. We know that there is no silver bullet to resolve the issues we are up against in public education, but offering unemployment insurance protection to ALL public school employees is the least we could do. Over the course of several legislative sessions, starting in 2019, the legislature created exemptions for what is essentially an unfair and confusing "reasonable assurance" test to qualify for unemployment insurance.

A key workforce has been left out of the exemption process and it's time to right that wrong. When classified employees don't have access to the protection of unemployment benefits it further exacerbates the workforce crisis by encouraging those classified employees to look for employment elsewhere. Public school bus drivers, special education assistants and other public education workers deserve the same right to access unemployment insurance as a Trimet bus driver or a Kindercare employee.

Fairness and equity aside, because we know these workers are not only the lowest wage workers in public schools, they are the most diverse, it doesn't sit well, knowing we talk about the cost of implementing this, but not the cost of not implementing this. We seem to be content to continue to throw money into the revolving door of recruitment, hiring and training an entire workforce, year after year. It makes no sense. Until we determine the true cost of the constant churn of employees, we cannot say that access to unemployment insurance is a cost we cannot afford.

As we work to resolve the many issues of crisis in our public education workforce, creating fair access to unemployment insurance for all public school employees will prove a crucial detail in districts ability to retain quality staff. This act alone could save the state millions in recruitment, hiring and training thousands of new workers every year.

Kyndall Mason, Public Affairs Consultant, Oregon Education Association