

Submitter: Heidi Toney
On Behalf Of: School bus drivers
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: SB489

SB489 Support

Thank you for hearing this bill .

I am Heidi Toney a Special Needs School bus driver.

School bus drivers are part of OSEA, bringing you Senate Bill (SB) 489, which would finally end the unique barrier to UI benefits that applies only to public education employees.

As a Special Needs driver I transport Precious cargo. My coworkers in both regular education and Special Needs undergo enormous stress handling as many as 80 children in a school bus navigating safely throughout congested traffic. Special needs children in wheelchairs or on life saving equipment are being transported with and without nurses. As a special needs school bus driver of 20 years I have struggled with disrespectful wages and many of my co workers are overwhelmingly women. Being singled out for individual assessments by Employment Department staff. To be denied UI benefits because they say it's likely that I will have a job when school starts again.

It was insulting to me when I was told by an unemployment representative that I was considered as a non professional employee by the school district and denied unemployment benefits because I had reasonable assurance of having a job during CoVID.

Federal unemployment law refers to us as "nonprofessional" education employees.

In the fact I am required by the district to receive continuous education and have an impeccable driving record while accepting more responsibility than most of you have at work reading this in a day.

Imagine, in that situation, being told, that.

But that is the level of disrespect and lack of support that our school bus drivers as employees are receiving under existing law.

Do not doubt that many OSEA members are economically fragile. Just knowing that I am treated equally as any other public driver or custodian having access to UI benefits makes a difference.

That little bit of extra economic stability, and respect, is what I need to be included in the remaining classifications of school employees, covered by SB 489.

It will not surprise you that lacking equal access to UI benefits is one of the reasons

that school employees feel that they aren't valued, respected and supported in their jobs. There is nothing equivalent to the "reasonable assurance" test for other public employees or any private sector workers. Federal unemployment law doesn't require Oregon to use the "reasonable assurance" test and eliminating it can only help our efforts to recruit and retain drivers who are skilled professionals in the classifications where we are having so much difficulty staffing.

Please pass that s Bill SB 489

I have struggled to keep my job because I love the children. I am a professional, please let me know as well as my coworkers know we matter.

Heidi Toney