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Department of English

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Oregon State Senate  
900 Court St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Roblan, members of the committee, and other concerned parties,

I didn't become a teacher because I thought it would be easy. I didn't earn my degrees and certifications because I thought education would be lucrative. And I didn't join the deep, deep pool of adjunct instructors in the state of Oregon because I knew my employment would be guaranteed. No, I chose to dedicate my life to education because I believe the classroom is one of the few places where genuine social justice can begin. Another important place, though, is the legislative floor, so it is with great honor that I contribute my perspective as an educator in consideration of Senate Bill 196.

As I draft this letter, I am nearing the end of my fifth year teaching, but I am still within my first year of work as a part-time, or adjunct, faculty member at Oregon colleges & universities. (To clarify, I currently work beyond the equivalent of 1.0 FTE, but spread across multiple institutions.) Despite my recent entry into this particular mode of teaching, I have already experienced the precarity of my employment: I have had classes cancelled last minute due to low enrollment, thus reducing my income by no small percentage; I have competed for institutional resources, reducing the amount of time I can dedicate to students; and, of primary concern here, I have spent late nights fretting over my access to the basic human need of health care.

All things considered, I am one of the fortunate. I have work. I have a domestic partner whose insurance includes me, though our premiums have more than doubled in the past month. I have some support from the unions, whose meager funds defray my out-of-pocket expenses. But in a time of political and legislative uncertainty, I am anxious that I could see these privileges disappear at any moment. I am fearful that I will be able to make ends meet, able to afford even a modicum of health services after my student loan payments and rent.

Reviewing my testimony so far, I realize that this sounds a lot like *my* problem: why should I burden your constituents with *my* needs? An easy answer is that I *am* a constituent, but a more serious response concerns my students. Each school year, I am responsible for the growth of up to 300 students of all ages, nationalities, religions, races, socioeconomic backgrounds. Every day, I navigate a complex and diverse classroom environment guided by the best interests of the learning population. I see their anxieties about surviving in the world outside the classroom, and I honestly cannot reassure them when I am just as fearful. We teachers

are resilient and optimistic, but we are still human—as such, we get sick; we have mental health challenges; we have families who rely on our support. Without reasonable, affordable access to health care services, we cannot bring our best selves to campus, nor can we ask the same of our students. I personally have felt the weight of this burden: struggling to remember the discussion points as I led a Socratic dialogue, my mind has been distracted by whether or not my partner and I will be able to visit the doctor the next time either of us falls ill. Teaching requires a certain degree of selflessness, and I cannot inhabit this characteristic without a sense of security. Those 300 students rely on my wellbeing which, one could argue, relies on SB 196.

The passage of this bill will not make teaching easy—nor would I necessarily want it to. What I *do* want is the peace of mind and confidence in body to focus my energies on my students and the real power (intellectual, political, and spritual) that they can discover in the classroom. Therefore, I proudly declare my support for SB 196 to facilitate the wellbeing, health, and agency of hardworking adjunct faculty and our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shane Abrams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Shane Abrams

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