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Bill extends unemployment for workers completing apprenticeship courses

SB 1544 removes a barrier from workers trying to attain middle class status

SALEM – Oregon Senate Democrats today passed legislation that helps apprentice workers overcome barriers to attaining long-term financial security.

The Democrats passed Senate Bill 1544 – which expands the amount of time an unemployed individual participating in an apprenticeship program is eligible for unemployment benefits during unpaid classroom training – by a 28-0 bipartisan vote on the Senate floor.

The bill will extend the amount of time an apprentice may access unemployment benefits from five to 10 weeks, while completing a required full-time training to fulfill program requirements. Apprenticeship programs often can last as many as 10 weeks – at a full-time workload – and apprentices are not paid for that time. Workers are required to complete unpaid apprenticeship programs as part of their training now will be eligible for unemployment benefits for the entire duration of their training.

“Apprenticeship programs expand our skilled labor pool to fill positions around the state and provide a great opportunity for Oregonians to put themselves on a secure career path,” Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), the bill’s chief sponsor, said. “This removes an unnecessary barrier to workers trying to obtain the skills they need to achieve financial security and lift themselves into the middle class.”

Apprenticeship programs provide job training for highly skilled, well-paying jobs as electricians, plumbers, sheet metal workers and many more. Once apprentices complete training, they can

attain secure future employment, with many earning between \$40 and \$56 per hour in wages and benefits.

SB 1544 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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