



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature
State Capitol
Salem, OR

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Molly Woon (503) 986-1074
molly.woon@state.or.us

Hearings on expansion of unemployment benefits to be held today in Senate Commerce & Workforce Development

SALEM – Chair Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland) and members of the Senate Commerce and Workforce Development Committee will hold a hearing this afternoon on two bills that will expand eligibility for out-of-work Oregonians seeking unemployment insurance.

SB 462 would change the formula for calculating unemployment benefits, allowing workers to count their most recent work experience when determining eligibility for unemployment insurance. Currently, eligibility is calculated on a ‘base period,’ or the first four of the most recently completed five calendar quarters. The change in SB 462 would allow claimants who have sufficient earnings in the most recent four quarters, but who fail to qualify under the existing base year, to qualify for unemployment benefits.

The Employment Department estimates that approximately 8% or 17,000 unemployment claims per year are denied due to lack of sufficient wages or hours worked in the base year. Approximately, one third of those claims, or 6,000, would be valid using an alternate base year. In addition, allowing an alternate base would benefit low-wage workers because they are more likely to have a history of intermittent work than are higher wage workers.

SB 463 would extend benefits to qualified part-time workers who lose their employment. The Employment Department estimates that approximately 7,000 additional workers per year will qualify for unemployment benefits. Currently, these workers are not eligible for benefits, even though employers pay unemployment taxes for part-time workers.

Both SB 463 and SB 462 are contingent upon the receipt of anticipated federal funds from the federal stimulus package and will have no impact on the Oregon General Fund budget.

WHO: Senate Commerce and Workforce Development Committee
WHAT: Hearing on expansion of unemployment benefits
WHERE: Hearing Room B, Oregon State Capitol
WHEN: Today, Wednesday, February 18, 2009, 3:00 P.M.