

Testimony in Support of H7158

We are writing today in support of H7158, legislation that would provide access to health insurance for adjunct faculty members.

According to a report prepared by InsideHigherEd, 45% of adjuncts nationwide have access to employer-provided health insurance. Nearly 19% rely on Medicare and/or Medicaid¹. Our part-time colleagues should be among that 45% and should not have to rely on public benefit programs rather than the employer-provided health insurance that other higher education employees can access. And what happens when adjunct faculty members cannot access health insurance?

Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. If adjunct faculty members do not have access to health insurance, they will experience health conditions that will impact their ability to provide the highest-quality education. InsideHigherEd reports that almost half of adjunct faculty nationwide have delayed necessary health care and over two thirds have not obtained needed dental care². Imagine trying to teach a full classroom of students while sick and in pain, with no idea when you will be able to get access to care? Such a faculty member deserves better—but so do the students in that classroom who are not receiving the highest-quality learning experience because their instructor has been denied access to care.

We would contend that the Council (referring here to the Council on Postsecondary Education) has been avoiding full-time hiring as part of a cost-savings enterprise that disadvantages our College and our students. While our adjunct colleagues are excellent teachers, they are often busy running from campus to campus rather than being available on campus to advise students, provide extra help, and participate in the curricular work that helps keep our programs current and essential. Saving money at their expense helps no one, and ensuring that they have health insurance both benefits them immediately and reduces the incentive to avoid hiring the full-time faculty who can do the most for our students' future development. It is worth pointing out here that the collective bargaining agreement for the RIC/AFT Local 1819, the union of full-time faculty, states in 7.11 that "Part-time appointments by the College shall not be used to circumvent the intent of this Agreement by eliminating the hiring of full-time personnel. When a department has in two (2) consecutive years the full-time equivalent of one and one-half (1 1/2) positions, exclusive of replacements created by leaves or emergencies, the Council shall make every effort to fund an additional full-time position for that department." This effort has not been made in recent years, and the fact that health insurance is not provided for our part-time colleagues further incentivizes the disinvestment in full-time faculty while simultaneously hurting our adjuncts.

We understand there are concerns with the cost of the bill. However, many adjuncts already have access to other health insurance, whether through a full-time primary employer (covering, for instance, nurses, accountants, and K-12 teachers who teach a course on the side to give back to their profession); a spouse; or because they are teaching part-time in retirement and covered by Medicare or a retiree health plan, like some of our own emeritus faculty. But for the smaller number

¹ https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/2024-06/IHE_Adjunct%20Faculty%20Compensation%20Models%20%281%29.pdf

² https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/2024-06/IHE_Adjunct%20Faculty%20Compensation%20Models%20%281%29.pdf

of adjunct faculty who do not have access to other health insurance, especially in this time of escalating Marketplace Plan costs, this legislation would be a lifesaver.

While we do have concerns with the language of the bill, in that it treats teaching hours as if they are the entirety of full-time faculty jobs when in fact full-time faculty have many other responsibilities (such as advising, committee work, assessment, scholarship, and public service), we believe that our part-time colleagues deserve access to health insurance benefits and as such urge the passage of H7158 immediately. Providing health insurance will make our colleagues' lives better, save money in emergency services that Rhode Island is currently providing for uninsured people, and provide a better learning experience for our students.



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