

# Oregon sets sessions on rules change in jobless benefits

By PETER WONG  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — State officials have scheduled six sessions, starting Thursday, Oct. 14, for the public and businesses to weigh in on a rule allowing workers to keep some unemployment benefits even if they have barriers to their returning to work. The temporary rule would let some workers continue to receive benefits despite their limited availability for work. Among the covered

situations are caring for a sick family member and the lack of child care. Under the rule, workers would have to seek alternate work if they are available at least one shift per day and 40 hours per week. “This may require people to seek a different type of job, but one they have the skills and experience to do,” the Oregon Employment Department said in its announcement of the webinars. The temporary rule follows after changes expired Sept. 26 to the long-

standing requirements for people to be able to work and available to work. Those requirements were reinstated on Sept. 26, 90 days after the end of an emergency declaration that suspended them during the coronavirus pandemic. The department will conduct all six webinars by registration at [unemployment.oregon.gov/webinars](http://unemployment.oregon.gov/webinars). Sessions will run 90 minutes but may end earlier if there are no further comments. Worker-focused sessions are

planned at 2:30 p.m. Oct. 14; noon Oct. 26, and 6 p.m. Nov. 9. Employer-focused sessions are planned at 6 p.m. Oct. 20; noon Nov. 3, and 9 a.m. Nov. 17. Simultaneous translation will be offered in Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian and Cantonese. In addition to helping some workers offset part of their lost income with unemployment benefits, an agency statement said the rule would help communities where a large number of people have faced

restricted work schedules because of the pandemic. Among them are people whose underlying health conditions may require them to limit their exposure to potential carriers of the COVID-19 virus. Proposed legislation pending in Congress, sponsored by Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D., and others, would require states to allow more flexibility in letting some workers retain a portion of unemployment benefits if they are otherwise able to obtain alternate work.

# Redmond School Board secures legal counsel to oppose pandemic mandates

By NICOLE BALES  
The Bulletin

REDMOND — The Redmond School Board will hire a Portland-based attorney to oppose state mask and vaccination mandates that have been leveled on K-12 schools to slow the spread of COVID-19.

The board voted 4-1 during a special meeting Oct. 5 to hire Thenell Law Group to represent the school district.

Shawn Hartfield, the board’s chair, said she is not ready to lose employees needed to keep Redmond schools open as a result of the vaccine mandate.



Hartfield

“We’ve got to do something,” she said.

The action follows a resolution the board approved in late August opposing the mandates. The board demanded local control over pandemic-related safety measures and vowed it would take legal action against the mandates and the use of medical and religious exemptions.

Gov. Kate Brown announced the mask mandate in late July for everyone in K-12 schools. The vaccine mandate announced in August, gives K-12 school staff and volunteers until Oct. 18 to get vaccinated against the virus or get approved for a medical or religious exemption.

Redmond School District expects to have numbers on how many employees are vaccinated and how many filed for exemptions later this week.

The district will pay Thenell Law Group a \$5,000 retainer, which will be used to pay legal fees. The legal services



Dean Guernsey/EO Media Group

Students at Sage Elementary School, Redmond, walk home from school with their parents on Oct. 4, 2021. Seven Redmond school bus drivers called in sick, forcing the district to cancel some routes.

will cost the district \$200 to \$350 per hour, and if the retainer is exhausted during the case, the school board may be asked to replenish funds.

Hartfield said the district’s attorney advised the board to seek outside counsel for the issue. Money to pay for the legal services will come out of the district’s contingency funds, which are savings for unexpected costs.

Liz Goodrich, the board member who voted against hiring legal support, asked how much the board is willing to spend. She pointed to a lawsuit brought by the conservative think tank, Freedom Foundation, challenging the governor’s mask mandate that was dismissed by the Oregon Court of Appeals in September after more than a year.

“If you’re talking about 14 months of

that kind of expense, is that really how we want our district money to be spent? I’m not comfortable at all with that kind of bill,” Goodrich said. “I’m not sure how this benefits our kids.”

In September, the board voted against its Superintendent Charan Cline’s recommendation to fire Tori Caudell, an elementary school teacher at Terrebonne Community School who refused to wear a mask in school. The board also asked the district to come up with a “creative” way to retain the teacher.

The school district on Oct. 4 canceled several school bus routes affecting more 140 students after seven bus drivers called in sick. It is believed the drivers called in sick as part of a coordinated walkout in protest of the governor’s vaccine mandate.

# State workers lose one round in fight against vaccine mandates

By AIMEE GREEN  
The Oregonian

SALEM — A group of 25 health care workers, firefighters and paramedics from across Oregon lost a round last week when the Oregon Court of Appeals refused to intervene to stop a state mandate requiring them to get fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 18.

The ruling, issued Oct. 5 is the first in at least eight lawsuits seeking to overturn the authority of Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority to force certain categories of workers to get their jobs or else risk losing their jobs.

Statewide, the governor has said hundreds of thousands of health care workers, K-12 educators and state executive branch employees — from Oregon State Police troopers to Brown’s office staff — must get fully vaccinated unless they qualify for medical or religious exemptions. Many medical experts argue higher vaccination rates are the best tool for ending the pandemic. Just 60% of Oregonians of all ages are fully vaccinated, and some experts say that might need

to reach 90% to stamp out the delta variant.

Since early September, more than 70 workers who fall under the mandate have signed on as plaintiffs in the eight lawsuits. Among their arguments: The governor and state public health officials have overstepped their authority; their right to shun vaccines under the First Amendment’s freedom of expression clause is under attack; and they’ll suffer irreparable harm if they’re fired or the vaccine causes side effects days or years down the road. Some also argue they should be allowed to wear masks and get tested once a week instead of undergoing vaccinations.

The Court of Appeals ruling in the first case — Oregon Medical Workers for Medical Freedom and Mandate Free Oregon vs. the Oregon Health Authority — doesn’t necessarily mean the fight for those plaintiffs is over. They still can continue and are likely to continue to pursue their cases, primarily in circuit courts, based on different arguments. But a key contention — that the Oregon Health Authority didn’t have the power to impose the vaccine mandate — was cast aside by the Appeals Court as inaccurate.

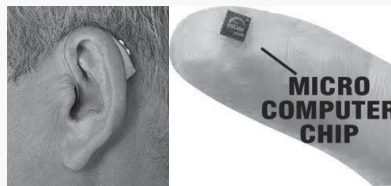
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