



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Feb. 10 Oregon Employment Department Media Statement**

Our next media availability is scheduled for 1 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 16.

### **Economic Update**

Last week, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that U.S. employers added 467,000 jobs in January. The unemployment rate was essentially unchanged at 4.0%.

In January, job gains were widespread across industries. Leisure and hospitality had the largest gain (151,000). Professional and business services added 86,000 jobs in January. Retail trade added 61,000 jobs over the month. Although gains were smaller, health care added 18,000 jobs in January, and local government education grew by 29,000 jobs.

The U.S. has recovered 87% of all jobs lost in the recession. Several sectors have fully recovered their pandemic recession job losses. They include retail trade, transportation and warehousing, information, financial activities, and professional and business services.

Amid the omicron wave of the pandemic, the Current Population Survey of households showed the number of employed people in the U.S. who missed work due to illness, injury, or a medical problem reached record-



high levels. Between Jan. 9 and Jan. 15, there were 3.6 million U.S. workers who reported they were not on the job due to their own illness or medical concern. Before January, this number peaked at 2.0 million in April 2020.

Another 4.2 million U.S. workers who usually have full-time schedules said they were down to part time because of their own illness or medical concern from Jan. 9 through Jan. 15. The prior peak for this was 3.3 million in February 2008.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also [recently reported unemployment rate comparisons](#) for all 50 states and the District of Columbia in December 2021. As of December, there were 12 states with unemployment rates at or below their all-time low going back to at least 1976. While Oregon has not yet returned to record low unemployment, it is one of four states with a higher labor force participation rate at the end of 2021 than before the pandemic recession.

## **Public Comment Sought on PFMLI Wages and Equivalent Plans Draft Rules**

Starting in September 2023, the Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance (PFMLI) program will allow workers to take paid time off when they need to recover from a serious illness or injury, welcome a new child, support an aging parent or if they experience sexual or domestic violence.

The Oregon Employment Department (OED) is inviting feedback on the next batch of draft rules that will outline how this life-line program will work. These rules focus on employee wages and equivalent plans. They define:

- **Wages** – What kind of income will be counted as “wages” when calculating a worker’s contribution and benefit amounts.
- **Equivalent plans** – By law, employers may set up their own paid leave program. However, these plans must offer the same level of benefits as the state program. These rules include requirements employers’ equivalent paid leave plans must meet to qualify for approval, application requirements, the cost to submit a plan, how to



make changes to a submitted plan, how and when the state terminates a plan, how an employer withdraws a plan, and more.

The public has two ways to provide public comment:

- Virtual: Register and attend the virtual public hearing from 3-5 p.m. on [Wednesday, Feb. 23](#) or 9-11 a.m. on [Monday, Feb. 28](#).
- Email: [Submit](#) comments by 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 1.

More information on the rules is on the [OED Administrative Rules webpage](#).

## **Self-Employment Assistance Program Provides Unemployed an Opportunity to Start Their Own Business**

The [Self Employment Assistance \(SEA\)](#) program is for people who are already eligible for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, interested in starting their own business **AND** who are likely to run out of benefits before they return to work.

With SEA, claimants can make money from their business, keep the proceeds **AND** receive their full weekly benefit payment. Their work-search requirements are to spend at least 40 hours working on their self-employment business activities.

More than 325 people participated in SEA in 2021. Interested individuals can visit the [SEA webpage](#) or call the UI Special Programs Center at 503-947-1800 to see if they meet eligibility requirements.

## **Modernization Surveys Employers**

With Frances Online, the new OED modernized system, going live in Sept. 2022, OED has launched an employer survey to receive feedback on the current systems and suggestions for improvement.

The first phase of the Frances project will support UI Tax and PFMLI Contributions, including employer payroll reporting.



“We are pleased to have received more than 1,600 responses, and more than 375 people have volunteered to participate in upcoming focus groups. If a business or third-party administrator has not received our survey, we encourage them to email us at [Employment.Modernization@employ.oregon.gov](mailto:Employment.Modernization@employ.oregon.gov),” said Renee Royston, modernization director. “We want to make sure Frances Online is simple and user friendly.”

The new online system is named in honor of Frances Perkins, the U.S. Secretary of Labor from 1933 – 1945 and the first woman to serve in a Presidential cabinet. More modernization project information is on the [OED website](#).

## **Modernization Program Recognized by U.S. Dept. of Labor**

Members of the OED Modernization Program recently were invited by the U.S. Department of Labor-Employment and Training Administration (USDOL-ETA) to present to other states working on their own modernization projects.

“The U.S. Department of Labor representatives described Oregon’s project as exemplary, expressed appreciation on behalf of their organization for the intentional and thorough work done by the Oregon team, and urged other states’ projects to follow up with the OED Modernization group for more resources,” said Renee Royston, OED modernization director.

“We are currently planning additional conversations and a demonstration of the Frances Online system,” she said.

Members of modernization teams from Nevada, Hawaii, and California, as well as members of the USDOL-ETA team, attended Oregon’s presentation to see how it related to their project planning and staffing models, extensive and inclusive request for proposal development and procurement process, vendor relationship management and collaboration, project execution experiences, and lessons learned.

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