

Submitter: Amanda Sager
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Amanda Sager and I represent 10,000 workers represented under Southern Oregon Central Labor Chapter.

We strongly encourage your support of SB 916 which would repeal the law blocking unemployment benefits to workers on strike. This bill would help ensure that workers are able to stay afloat while fighting for a fair contract.

Strikes are never taken lightly. In order to strike, workers take a “strike vote” to ensure that all workers are in support due to the immense sacrifices involved. If you ask workers about going on strike, many would say that their hands were forced by employers. Employers who refused to negotiate for years, rolled back benefits, froze wages, or did not address safety concerns. Look at what happened with at Providence across the state.

We know that there is a power imbalance in this country between employers and workers - a gap that has only grown wider. Companies are making record profits while wages stay stagnant or unable to keep up with inflation. While employers are paid throughout bargaining and can often “starve out” employees, workers are forced to make increasingly difficult choices. If employers can remove healthcare access from striking workers, workers should be able to receive unemployment benefits to help with COBRA costs and more.

UI was intended to serve exactly these types of situations. The unemployment insurance system was established in 1935 to safeguard workers and families against an unexpected loss of income due to unemployment and to support the overall economy during economic downturns. The system was also intended to prevent jobless workers from having to accept employment that is unsafe, unsuitable, or a poor match for their skills and abilities, which would drive down wages and depress labor standards for workers across the board.

Like other workers served by the UI system, striking workers are not receiving paychecks and are disconnected from their employers, at least temporarily. Striking workers may expect to return to work for the same employer, as do many other categories of workers who are currently eligible for UI benefits in most states, such as seasonal workers, workers on temporary layoff, and workers in Short Time Compensation programs.

Offering UI benefits to striking workers also aligns with the purpose of UI on a more

fundamental level: Workers use the right to strike to challenge unsafe, exploitative, or otherwise unsuitable workplace conditions, low wages, and other harmful employment practices—the same types of substandard work the system was designed to safeguard against.

Recent studies suggest that every \$1 spent in UI benefits puts \$2 back into the economy.

Establishing UI for striking workers will increase stability across sectors due to impacts on retention, worker satisfaction, and workplace standards. Additionally, it will help workers and their families continue to afford necessities and spend money in their communities, sustaining support for the local economy and small businesses.