



February 5, 2025

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 916

Oregon State Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Deanna Palm, and I serve as the President and CEO for the Washington County Chamber of Commerce. Our organization represents over 75,000 jobs across diverse industries in Washington County. On behalf of our members and the business community, I am submitting testimony in **strong opposition to SB 916**, which proposes to extend unemployment benefits to striking workers.

While we support fair labor practices and workers' rights, SB 916 introduces policies that could significantly disrupt Oregon's economic stability and undermine the foundational principles of the unemployment insurance (UI) system. This legislation may lead to unintended consequences adversely affecting businesses, the state's unemployment trust fund, and the broader workforce.

Concerns with SB 916:

Unemployment Insurance is Designed for Involuntary Unemployment

The primary purpose of unemployment insurance is to provide temporary financial assistance to workers who become unemployed through no fault of their own, such as layoffs or business closures. Extending benefits to individuals who are voluntarily not working due to participation in a labor dispute deviates from this core intent.

Potential Strain on Oregon's Unemployment Trust Fund

Expanding UI benefits to include striking workers could increase the financial burden on the state's unemployment trust fund. This expansion may lead to higher unemployment insurance costs for employers and strain the state's UI trust fund, ultimately impacting Oregon businesses and job stability.

Impact on the Collective Bargaining Process

Providing unemployment benefits to striking workers could alter the dynamics of labor negotiations, potentially discouraging fair, good-faith discussions between employers and employees. This shift may pressure businesses to concede to demands irrespective of financial feasibility, thereby disrupting the balance intended in collective bargaining frameworks. Employer advocates have expressed concerns that such measures could unfairly tip the scales in labor disputes.

The Washington County Chamber of Commerce is committed to advocating for policies that protect both workers and businesses. For these reasons, we respectfully urge the committee to reject SB 916. We advocate for legislative approaches that uphold the integrity of Oregon's unemployment system while fostering economic growth and workforce stability.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions and appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this critical issue.

Respectfully yours,
Deanna Palm
President & CEO
Washington County Chamber of Commerce