

Submitter: Bethany Schaffner

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

My name is Bethany Schaffner and I'm a Special Education Assistant and a member of Aft, Local 4671. I support 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.

As a classified school support professional working with students that thrive from one on one support, having the ability to receive unemployment benefits while on strike would allow my Union to push for stronger safety measures in our contract. Recognizing the critical role support staff have in the lives of our students, we cannot ignore that more needs to be done to protect staff during times of escalated behaviors. Without these protections staff often seek work outside of our schools, which leaves our students vulnerable to an influx of unfamiliar staffing changes. We want to be with our students. We want to give them the continuity of familiar faces, while also ensuring a safe environment for ourselves and our coworkers. I am fortunate to be part of a double-income household but many of our classified staff depend solely on their income. Without the benefit of unemployment insurance many cannot afford to walk out on their jobs no matter the risks they face in the classroom. We do this work because we love our students and want to see them succeed but we should not be afraid to speak out in the form of a strike simply because we cannot afford to miss a day of work.

Ending this exclusion of UI benefits for strikes that go over 7 days will help make sure that workers like me can continue to pay our rent, feed our families, afford prescription drugs or pay our COBRA health care payments while out on strike. This will mean that we aren't forced into an unsafe or unfair contract just because the employer can starve us out. And those UI payments will work as intended: to also put money back into the local economy at times of economic distress.

Strikes are always a measure of absolute last resort. Please help ensure that workers like me – nurses, teachers, grocery and construction workers and so many more – are not forced into unsafe or unfair contracts simply because we can't afford to exercise our legally protected right to strike. Please vote yes on SB 916.