

Laborers' Local 483  
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**RE: SB 916 UI for Striking Workers**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ryan Sotomayor and I represent the members of Laborers' Local 483, primarily a municipal worker and public employee union representing workers throughout the state of Oregon, but the majority of whom work and reside in the Portland Metro area. Our Local is affiliated with the Laborers International Union of North America, a union of over a half-million members who work throughout our construction industry as well as public service, sanitation, road maintenance, and emergency response.

We strongly encourage your support of SB 916, which would repeal the law that prohibits workers on strike from being eligible for unemployment benefits. This bill would help ensure that workers are able to stay afloat while exercising their rights and advocating for a fair contract.

In early 2023, Portland City Laborers' members of LIUNA Local 483 went out on a three day strike following 10 months of difficult negotiations with the City. 483 members at the City worked tirelessly to keep many of Portland's vital services and operations running throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic to help support the needs of our community, many working in jobs that inherently preclude any possibility for remote work. Laborers continued their essential work in transportation, wastewater treatment, as well as operation and maintenance of facilities and core infrastructure throughout the city that community members rely on every day. Portland City Laborers also worked in community centers with county employees and outside partners that were used as temporary shelters for unhoused city residents. Members agreed to economic concessions during the COVID crisis to prevent layoffs yet, unfortunately, that good-faith spirit went largely unrecognized and unreciprocated once contract negotiations later began. Members went through months of bargaining to address scheduled wages, increases, benefits, cost of living, worker safety, and many other concerns.

Ultimately, the decision to strike was not considered lightly and members spent months in addition to direct bargaining with a mediator to try and reach a resolution with the city of Portland. In order to ultimately weigh the decision to strike, members held a democratic "strike vote" to ensure that all workers' voices were heard to determine this direction, due to the immense sacrifices involved. If you asked our members about going on strike, many would say that their hands were forced by the employer.

**LIUNA!**  
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Northwest Oregon Labor Council  
Oregon & Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers  
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We know that there can be a fundamental power imbalance in this country between employers and workers—a gap that many Portland City Laborers experienced first-hand during this experience. While employers are paid throughout the bargaining process and can choose to “wait out” employees, workers can be 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. During and after the strike, the local union supported many different members with connecting to community assistance resources and safety net services, some of which were not available to them while they were on strike. We also assisted members with food insecurity, utilities and, in some cases, mortgage and rental assistance.

Providing workers access to unemployment insurance during a strike like the one that Portland City Laborers went through could have ensured a greater degree of financial stability while workers were advocating for improved working conditions. Having this law in place would have served to help rebalance the power dynamics with the employer and better reinforce an ongoing environment of good-faith negotiations with workers to reach a fair outcome.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Ryan Sotomayor  
Business Manager/Secretary-Treasurer  
Laborers' Local 483

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