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Testimony in Support of UI for Striking Workers (SB 916)

To the Senate Committee on Labor and Business:

In Oregon, workers on strike, particularly in sectors like health care, should be eligible for unemployment benefits after seven days of striking for several important reasons.

1. **Economic Hardship During Strike:** While workers may go on strike to address grievances such as unfair wages, working conditions, or benefits, they still face significant financial strain during a strike. Without the ability to claim unemployment benefits, workers risk losing their livelihood, particularly in low- or middle-income brackets where they may not have enough savings to cover extended periods without pay. Extending unemployment benefits after seven days would provide a safety net that helps them maintain economic stability during a time of collective bargaining.
2. **Encouraging Fair Negotiations:** A law that provides unemployment benefits after a short waiting period—like seven days—could encourage employers to engage more earnestly in negotiations. Knowing that workers are less financially vulnerable could reduce the incentive for employers to prolong the strike or use financial pressure tactics, creating a more balanced environment for labor disputes.
3. **Health Care Workers' Unique Role:** Health care workers, in particular, face unique challenges when it comes to strikes. Their work directly affects the well-being of vulnerable populations, so when they go on strike, it can create immediate and long-term consequences for patient care. These workers often find themselves in a position where they have to choose between fighting for better working conditions and benefits and jeopardizing their own financial stability. Extending unemployment benefits would allow them to focus on negotiating without the added burden of financial insecurity.
4. **State Responsibility to Protect Workers:** Oregon, known for its progressive labor policies, has a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that its workers can stand up for their rights without risking their financial future. By offering unemployment benefits after a brief waiting period, the state would be reaffirming its commitment to protecting workers' rights and providing fair, equitable conditions for collective bargaining.
5. **Aligning with Worker Protection Policies:** Other states have recognized the importance of protecting workers on strike and have implemented similar measures to ensure that strikers can receive unemployment benefits after a waiting period. Oregon could follow suit, ensuring that its workers are on par with other states in terms of protections for labor actions.

In short, by passing a law that offers unemployment benefits after seven days of striking, Oregon would be supporting its workers' ability to engage in lawful strikes while ensuring they do not suffer undue hardship. This would lead to fairer negotiations, greater job security for workers, and a healthier labor landscape in the state.

Especially when workers are up against billion-dollar corporations. In these situations, the imbalance of power is stark. Large corporations often have deep financial reserves that allow them to withstand strikes for extended periods, while workers—who are often living paycheck to paycheck—face immense financial pressure.

By providing unemployment benefits after seven days of a strike, Oregon would be leveling the playing field. It's a necessary protection for workers who are standing up not only for better wages and conditions but also against the vast financial and legal resources of corporate giants. These corporations can afford to wait out a strike, but that doesn't mean workers should be forced into financial ruin just to demand fair treatment.

Additionally, when workers are striking against billion-dollar entities—whether it's a major health care provider or another large industry—their fight isn't just about individual gains but often about broader issues like improving community care, worker rights, or even ensuring affordable services. The state's intervention through unemployment benefits after a short waiting period could help ensure that these struggles aren't derailed by financial hardship, allowing workers to stay focused on the cause.

Ultimately, in a state like Oregon that prides itself on progressive values, it's critical that workers are protected against the outsized influence of these corporations, especially when they're standing up for the greater good of the community.

Thank you for accepting my testimony and I look forward to your support.