

February 6, 2025

To: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

From: Gina Ottinger, RN, Oregon Nurses Association

In support of SB 916

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and members of the Committee, my name is Gina Ottinger, and I've been a nurse at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland for the past 17 years.

I'm here today to ask you to support SB 916 to allow workers to access unemployment benefits while we are on strike.

I am on a strike now that has been going for 28 days. Striking is the last thing any healthcare worker wants to do, especially in an emergency room where lives are on the line every minute. But when management refuses to listen to the safety concerns we raise—when they won't negotiate in good faith to improve staffing, address unsafe working conditions, and issues with patient care, or provide fair pay—we have no choice but to take action.

Strikes like the current one are about more than just wages—they're about ensuring that we can provide safe, quality care to the people who rely on us. We're asking for better staffing to ensure we can keep patients safe, and we're asking for fair wages. But in the end, we're fighting for the future of healthcare in Oregon, and for the safety of every patient who walks through our doors.

The reality is, when we strike, we don't just lose income—we lose our ability to take care of our families. The idea of going weeks without pay is overwhelming. And while we sacrifice our livelihoods to fight for what's right, to fight for a stronger healthcare infrastructure in Oregon, management continues to get paid. Providence executives have the resources to prolong this strike, all while denying us what we need as employees and as human beings. It is unfair.

One of the reasons we're on strike is for a strong healthcare benefit—and this should be Providence's wheelhouse, being self-insured and the largest healthcare employer in the state. Instead, at the start of this year, we were changed to Aetna insurance, throwing into question whether we could get care at the places we work, and causing Providence employees enormous out-of-pocket costs for routine, but also even life-saving, care.

I know if we had access to unemployment insurance during a strike, it would give workers like us the financial stability to stand our ground to secure the changes that are necessary for the future of healthcare in Oregon. Without this, we risk giving in to pressure—not because we don't care about patient safety, the communities across the state that we serve, or fair treatment, but because the personal financial ruin the employer relied upon worked.

By supporting this bill, you're supporting a system where workers can fight for what's right without being forced to choose between their principles and their ability to care for their families.

Thank you.