

Submitter: Robert Schwartz
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 916/House Bill 3434
Submitted to the Senate Committee on Labor and Business
By: Robert Schwartz, Registered Nurse at Providence Milwaukie Hospital
Date: February 10, 2025

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Robert Schwartz, and I have been a registered nurse at Providence Milwaukie Hospital for 1.5 years. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 916 and House Bill 3434, which would allow striking workers to receive unemployment benefits after seven days on strike.

Since January 10, I have been on strike alongside my colleagues, fighting for fair wages, safe staffing, and working conditions that ensure quality patient care. Instead of resolving this dispute fairly, Providence has chosen to spend more than \$50 million on prolonging the strike—far more than it would have cost to settle our contract in the first place. This is not about financial constraints; this is about breaking the will of their own workforce through economic pressure.

Providence has the money. According to their own financial reports, they hold \$1.4 billion in cash reserves. Our contract resolution would require just 3 percent of that. Instead of investing in its workforce, Providence has deliberately chosen to engage in a drawn-out financial battle, knowing that nurses cannot go without pay indefinitely. Their strategy is clear: outlast us, force us into financial desperation, and weaken our ability to fight for a fair contract.

This bill is necessary because it helps even the playing field, forcing employers like Providence to negotiate in good faith instead of waging a war of attrition against their own workers. Right now, the system is stacked in favor of massive corporations that can afford to spend tens of millions to crush their employees while those same employees are left without any financial support.

If unemployment benefits had been available during this strike, it would have made a tremendous difference for me and my colleagues. Instead, many of us have had to make impossible choices—how to pay rent, how to afford food, how to care for our families—all while standing on the picket line fighting for safe patient care. Meanwhile, Providence spares no expense to wait us out.

No worker should have to endure this kind of financial coercion just for demanding fair wages and safe working conditions. Senate Bill 916 and House Bill 3434 do not give striking workers an advantage; they simply provide a small measure of stability so we can stand up for what is right without being starved into submission.

I urge this committee to pass this bill and take a stand for fairness, dignity, and the right of workers to advocate for a better future without being financially destroyed in the process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Robert Schwartz
Registered Nurse, Providence Milwaukie Hospital