

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

I am writing to express my support for SB 916, which seeks to repeal Oregon's prohibition on unemployment benefits for workers engaged in a strike. As a union field representative, I have seen firsthand the difficult choices workers face when they consider striking as a last resort. This legislation is not about rewarding those who walk off the job lightly—it is about restoring a basic economic safeguard for workers exercising their legal right to bargain for fair wages and working conditions.

Authorizing a strike is not a decision taken lightly. It is a measure of last resort when negotiations break down after months, or even years, of good-faith bargaining. The current law creates an unfair economic imbalance, favoring employers who can simply wait out workers who cannot afford to lose income. By denying unemployment benefits, Oregon effectively forces workers into a no-win situation: accept poor working conditions or risk financial ruin. That is not a true exercise of free and fair bargaining—it is coercion.

Some argue that striking is a choice, and therefore, workers should not have access to unemployment benefits. However, this perspective ignores the reality of labor negotiations. Employers hold immense leverage, including the ability to replace striking workers or prolong negotiations indefinitely. Meanwhile, workers—many of whom live paycheck to paycheck—are left without options. Unemployment benefits provide a minimal financial safety net that allows workers to stand up for their rights without the fear of immediate economic devastation.

Other states, including New York and New Jersey, already provide unemployment benefits for striking workers under certain conditions. Oregon should follow suit by recognizing that collective bargaining is a fundamental right, and those who exercise it should not be financially punished for doing so. SB 916 would help level the playing field and ensure that workers are not forced into submission simply because they cannot afford to strike.

As someone who represents and advocates for workers daily, I urge the committee to pass SB 916 and take a stand for the rights of Oregon's workers. Thank you for your time and consideration.