

Honorable Legislators,

My name is Kathleen Kuffin and I'm a former Local President of Woodburn Education Association and a current member of Oregon Education Association Retired Educators' union. I support SB 916 which would repeal the law blocking unemployment benefits to workers on strike. This bill would help ensure that workers are able to stay afloat while fighting for a fair contract.

Most education workers live marginally from paycheck to paycheck. In bargaining our most recent collective bargaining agreement, we very nearly went on strike. It was terrifying for most of us to risk going without an income and health benefits for our families for an indefinite period of time. This fear is the foremost barrier to workers' claiming their full voice in achieving fair wages and necessary improvements to our working conditions. A close colleague of mine was preparing to move with her husband and 2-year-old child into her parents' garage to weather the strike. No one should have to do that in order to get a fair contract!

Ending this exclusion of UI benefits for strikes that go over 7 days will help make sure that workers like me can continue to pay our rent, feed our families, afford prescription drugs or pay our COBRA health care payments while out on strike. This will mean that we aren't forced into an unsafe or unfair contract just because the employer can starve us out. And those UI payments will work as intended: to also put money back into the local economy at times of economic distress.

Strikes are always a measure of absolute last resort. Please help ensure that workers like me – nurses, teachers, grocery and construction workers and so many more – are not forced into unsafe or unfair contracts simply because we can't afford to exercise our legally protected right to strike. Please vote yes on SB 916.

Oregon has led the nation in many laws that support working families and children. It's important to support workers now as they struggle not to retain their fair share of the bounty of a strong economy.

Thank you,  
Kathleen Kuffin