

Testimony in Support of SB 916

Submitted by: Anna Karbel, RN

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Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 916, which proposes extending unemployment insurance benefits to workers who are unemployed due to a labor dispute.

As a registered nurse, I want to highlight how this bill directly impacts healthcare workers and the patients and communities we serve. In healthcare, we are always focused on our patients. It doesn't matter who you are—when you are sick and come to the emergency department, we care for you. But to provide the care our patients deserve, we must also advocate for safe working conditions, appropriate staffing levels, and the resources needed to deliver quality care.

Striking is never a decision we take lightly. It's not where we want to be—we would much rather be at work, helping our patients. However, when the system is broken, and unsafe conditions persist, we are left with no other choice. We do this to protect our patients, our communities, and our professional licenses, which are at risk if we are forced to work in unsafe or understaffed environments.

Currently, workers who participate in lawful strikes to advocate for better wages, benefits, or safer working conditions are ineligible for unemployment benefits. This exclusion places significant financial strain on individuals and their families, often forcing them to choose between standing up for their rights and meeting basic needs such as rent, food, and healthcare.

By extending unemployment insurance benefits to striking workers, SB 916 would help alleviate these hardships, allowing individuals to advocate for fair treatment without the fear of financial ruin. This measure would also promote fair bargaining practices by balancing the power dynamics between employers and employees, encouraging more meaningful negotiations and leading to improved workplace conditions.

Furthermore, supporting workers in this manner strengthens Oregon's workforce and contributes to a more just and equitable economy. By passing SB 916, Oregon would join other states in recognizing that unemployment benefits should serve all workers, including those exercising their legally protected rights.

I urge the committee to support SB 916 and take this necessary step toward ensuring economic security and fairness for all workers in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Anna Karbel, RN (she/her/hers)