

Submitter: Cynthia Vazquez
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916
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RE: Testimony in Support for SB 916

To the Senate Committee on Labor and Business,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 916. I am an Emergency Department RN who is unfortunately currently on the strike line. I can only speak to my experience, and to those that I stand beside on the freezing cold sidewalk as we fight for what our patients, and nurses deserve. Deciding to go on strike is never an easy decision, and as a collective bargaining union, we have come to this moment due to unfair negotiations and our employer refusing to bargain in good faith.

My spouse and I are active members of our community, both emergency department nurses currently on strike. Going on strike is never taken lightly; in our household, many discussions were had and many tears were shed leading up to this strike. In our home, the decision to go on strike meant that we would have no income, and a constant worry about how we were going to make ends meet. We were planning to begin IVF treatments this year, and due to the financial impact of this strike, we will have to pause those plans. Striking nurses have had to drain savings, take out against their retirement, take out loans, donate plasma, sell belongings, go to food banks for groceries and ask friends and family for support.

Although I can understand why some of the general public may see striking as a “choice”, to those fighting for ourselves and patients, it is a choice we have to make. A choice to fight for what is right, against big corporations, and organizations that continue to try and bargain in poor faith.

I am so exhausted of having to carry the burden and moral distress of public disapproval because the hospital system is refusing to adequately provide us the bare minimum, on the basis of “cost”, yet it was reported that Providence spent approximately \$25.39 million per week on replacement nurses—\$1,400 per replacement nurse per day. (Source: Oregon Nurses Association).

We are unfortunately up against a 20-billion-dollar corporation that has the means to “wait us out”, and can afford to replace their workers as long as they need, without having to bargain in good faith.

Although I understand that I am speaking on behalf of nurses, and hospital systems; workers in all unions deserve to be able to stay afloat while fighting for a fair contract.

SB 916 is not intended to be wage replacement, and I can assure that no striking worker will be using this to “get rich”, as there are already limitations in place. SB 916 will help us all on our fight in creating an equal playing field. I encourage this committee to stand with hard working Oregonians and pass this very significant legislation.

Furthermore, Economic Policy Institute recently released a study <https://www.epi.org/publication/ui-striking-workers/>, which concluded:

- * EPI estimates that the cost of extending employment insurance to strikers would represent between 0.04% to 0.96% of a given state’s total UI expenditures—an almost negligible share.

- * These policies don’t only impact striking workers; they also help stabilize the economy by keeping dollars flowing to communities where a strike is taking place.

- * While opponents have raised concerns that such policies will encourage more strikes, providing UI protections to striking workers may actually lead to fewer strikes.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to your support.

Cynthia Vazquez BSN RN