

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

I strongly support Senate Bill 916 because it will end the exclusion of Unemployment Insurance benefits for workers when they are on strike.

Though I'm retired now, I worked in several jobs over the years some of which were covered by union contracts and some of which weren't. I always preferred working under strong union contracts because it felt like employees were more respected by employers when a union was involved. With that respect, our future as employees was more certain and that certainty made it possible to plan for the needs of my family. I am somewhat surprised that Oregon, my home for most of the last fifty years and a state that I love, has not long since made unemployment insurance payments available to striking employees. I have personally been on strike only once in my work life and I know what a struggle it was for employees to make the decision to strike but I know when it happens it is the only recourse for employees. I recently watched in dismay as our local school board refused to bargain in good faith with our teachers (I have three grandchildren in school in Albany) for months knowing that they could hold the withholding of health insurance as well as the lack of unemployment insurance over the teachers heads to gain bargaining advantage. This is not right and should not be tolerated in Oregon.

Workers don't go on strike lightly. By the time a strike happens, employees have often spent weeks, months, or even years negotiating in good faith. Many continue working under expired contracts because they believe in their work and need to pay their bills. SB 916 is a simple, fair policy that will prevent striking workers from falling into financial crisis.

Employers have the power to strip healthcare benefits from striking workers, leaving them with impossible choices. UI is a partial wage replacement, not a full paycheck, but it will allow workers to stay in their homes, keep their lights on, and avoid financial ruin.

This policy has minimal costs to the UI system and to employers, but it would make a world of difference to working families. Passing SB 916 ensures workers can bargain fairly without being starved into accepting bad deals.

Oregon should stand up for working people by passing this bill.