

Submitter: Ariana Jacob

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 916, which would end the exclusion of Unemployment Insurance benefits for workers when they are on strike.

AFT-OR is a Federation of 27 education unions across Oregon. Over the last decade only 2 of our unions have ever gone on strike. But when we have had those strikes being able to access unemployment benefits would have made such a difference to the workers on the line. It would have meant workers would have had the security of knowing they could keep paying their bills while the strike was on. And it would have meant that management would have had an incentive to negotiate proactively to end the strike quickly rather than stalling in hopes of pushing the workers to cave because they ran out of funds to support themselves and their families.

Strikes don't happen overnight. They are the result of long, difficult negotiations, and they are always the last resort. Many workers remain on the job under expired contracts for years, choosing to keep workplaces running rather than striking. But when an employer refuses to negotiate fairly, a strike becomes necessary.

Right now, employers can strip healthcare benefits away from striking workers. That is an enormous burden on working families. SB 916 is a small but vital protection that would ensure striking workers can still put food on the table and afford basic expenses.

This policy has minimal costs and will not place a significant burden on the unemployment insurance system. Instead, it will lead to shorter, fairer strikes by ensuring employers can't simply wait workers out.

Oregon must pass SB 916 and make the bargaining process more balanced.