

Submitter: Mark Clark
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

I urge lawmakers to pass Senate Bill 916 to support striking workers in Oregon.

When workers find it necessary to strike, after contract negotiations that provide no satisfaction, they are put at risk of financial collapse when the checks they have relied upon stop coming. So many workers exist in a paycheck-to-paycheck environment, and this by itself is troubling. What I see is this very circumstance being used by companies to bleed these striking workers until they have no other recourse but to abandon their strike and return to work, by default handing the company a win. This playing field is not level: the attorneys for the company continue to receive their checks, the management teams continue to be paid; it is only the rank and file, those who provide the finished value to the owners and shareholders, who are SOL. And in so many cases, the conditions which led to the strike remain unchanged.

SB 916 is not a giveaway; it is not “one more benefit” demanded by rabble rousers. The passage of this bill allows striking workers to pay for the most essential aspects of living in our society as they apply their last-ditch effort to improve their working conditions. The alternative is eviction and/or food stamps, both of which introduce new taxpayer and societal burden. The engine of the economy relies on a happy and engaged workforce, and the passage of SB 916 is a solid step toward this end.

Workers strike only after every other option has been exhausted. In many cases, they continue working under expired contracts for months or years, making sacrifices because they care about their jobs. SB 916 is a simple, fair measure to ensure that when workers must strike, they don't face total financial devastation.

Employers often use healthcare benefits as a weapon in labor disputes. Cutting off healthcare during a strike puts workers and their families in an impossible situation. Unemployment benefits are a reasonable safeguard that will prevent workers from falling into crisis while they stand up for fair wages and conditions.

This bill is low-cost, does not significantly impact employers, and would result in shorter strikes and fairer contracts. Oregon should pass SB 916 and support its workers.