

Submitter: Catherine Cascade
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
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.

When I was active in a union I was an underpaid Master's level mental health worker and single mother. The possibility of a strike was what gave us power during very difficult bargaining sessions. But the prospect of going without income was terrifying. Extending unemployment insurance to strikers is essential to strengthening the role of unions and the wellbeing of the working class.

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.