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

I am submitting testimony in support of Senate Bill 916 to end the exclusion of Unemployment Insurance benefits for workers when they are on strike in Oregon.

I can't stress enough how many strikes will be prevented by this bill. Employers drag things out, quibble, spend weeks negotiating ground rules, and other time wasting nonsense. They do this because every day a worker goes without a contract is a day they're not paying what they should be. They sometimes anticipate strikes and hope that they will financially break their employees and hope their spirits will also break. If an employer knows that a worker can stay on strike because of partial wage replacement, they will be much more likely to get down to business, bargain in good faith, and not put employees in a position where they have to go on strike. Fewer strikes means fewer interruptions to services such as medical care. I support this bill because I believe in incentivizing businesses to act like serious people. Also, it is quite clear we cannot count on our federal government to uphold the laws of the land and the principles of the Constitution. It is very likely that corporations will see this as a license to gain greater profit at the cost of people's lives, we in Oregon have to hold our businesses accountable ourselves. We have to stand on our own feet, fly with our own wings, and let businesses such as healthcare corporations know that people's lives are more important than profit.

Strikes are never the first choice for workers—they are the last resort after exhausting all other options. Often, workers continue showing up under expired contracts for months or even years because they care about their jobs and their communities. But when an employer refuses to bargain in good faith, workers sometimes have no choice but to strike. SB 916 is a commonsense policy that ensures striking workers can still afford necessities like rent, groceries, and healthcare.

Employers already hold significant leverage in these situations, and many use tactics like cutting healthcare benefits to pressure workers back to the table. If employers can take away healthcare, then workers should have the right to access unemployment benefits. UI is not a full paycheck—it is a partial wage replacement that allows workers to survive while they fight for fair contracts.

This policy comes at an extremely low cost to the UI fund and has minimal impact on employers. In the rare cases of public sector strikes, the ability to access UI benefits will make a meaningful difference for workers.

Passing SB 916 will lead to fairer negotiations, shorter strikes, and a more balanced bargaining process. Oregon workers deserve this basic protection.