

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chrissy Reitz, as a member of the Hood River County School District Board of Directors, I urge you to **oppose Senate Bill 916**. While I deeply respect the collective bargaining process and the vital role of educators and school employees, this bill raises serious concerns about its potential impact on students, families, and the responsible stewardship of public funds.

Simply put, this bill has real potential to:

One, Increase the risk of longer and more frequent strikes – A prolonged or more frequent disruption of school operations directly affects students' education, well-being, and sense of stability. Providing unemployment benefits during strikes reduces the incentive to resolve labor disputes quickly, which could delay students' return to the classroom and cause undue stress for families who rely on schools for learning, structure, and essential services.

Two, it would divert critical resources away from student learning. Based on the last three years' history, projections from the Oregon Employment Department indicate that reimbursing employers could spend nearly \$6 million on unemployment benefits for striking workers in the 25-27 biennium. In the case of public employers, like schools, those benefits are being paid with taxpayer dollars.. At a time when school budgets are already stretched, these are funds that would be better invested in classrooms, instructional support, and programs that enhance student success. I believe the public would view this bill negatively during a time when public education is already facing increased scrutiny at the state and federal levels. Strikes are never easy for anyone involved, and school districts have, and will remain, committed to working collaboratively with employees to reach fair and timely agreements. Policies that may unintentionally incentivize longer disputes do not serve the best interests of students, families, or communities.

I would like to close with this, there has been a great deal said about accountability during this legislative session, so I ask you, where is the accountability in SB916? Where are the checks and balances to ensure that striking workers come back to the table and their students in a timely manner? Where is the recognition of costs that will be assumed by the district for our staff that are not included in the strike but may not be able to work because of school closures. Who would be responsible for the additional compensation for substitute educators if needed? Where are the funds from the state that districts will need to offset the cost of any additional administrative work? How do we explain to our tax payers that we are spending their money on paperwork and not directly on student's educational needs? I urge you to **oppose SB 916** and instead advocate for policies that promote stability, fairness, and fiscal responsibility in Oregon's education system. Thank you for your leadership and for considering the needs of students as you evaluate this legislation.