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To: House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards
From: Martha Sonato, Legislative Advocate
Re: Support for SB 916A
Date: April 30, 2025

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC) in support of Senate Bill 916A. OLC works to ensure fairness and justice for low-income Oregonians by providing free legal help.

Oregon Law Center often works within the Unemployment Insurance system on behalf of our clients. When our clients come to us, it is an extremely difficult time in their lives. For many, UI is a lifeline, helping them stay financially afloat while seeking new employment. The unemployment insurance system, established in 1935, was designed to safeguard workers and families against an unexpected loss of income due to unemployment and to support the overall economy during economic downturns. The system was also intended to prevent jobless workers from having to accept employment that is unsafe, unsuitable, or a poor match for their skills and abilities, which would drive down wages and depress labor standards for workers across the board.

We support SB 916A because extending UI benefits to striking workers aligns with the purpose of UI on a more fundamental level: Workers use the right to strike to challenge unsafe, exploitative, or otherwise unsuitable workplace conditions, low wages, and other harmful employment practices—the same types of substandard work the system was designed to safeguard against.

We understand the bill was significantly amended during negotiations in the Senate. Some key compromises worth noting include:

- Striking workers would become eligible for UI after two weeks, instead of the standard one-week waiting period.
- If a worker receives UI benefits during a labor dispute, and later receives back pay for the same period, they would be required to repay the overpaid benefits.
- For school district employees, any UI benefits during a labor dispute would be deducted from their future wages.

Too often, workers must choose between standing up for their rights or paying their bills. SB 916A gives them a safety net so they can push for fair treatment without the fear of financial disaster, which is especially important for low-income workers who may not have savings to rely on.

At a broader level, SB 916A makes Oregon's workforce stronger. When workers can negotiate better pay and conditions, jobs become more stable, fewer people quit, and workplaces

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improve. This benefits entire industries and communities. Even workers who aren't in unions see better pay and protections when others win improvements.

In the end, SB 916A is about fairness, financial security, and strengthening Oregon's workforce. We urge your support to help ensure all workers can stand up for their rights without putting their well-being at risk.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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