



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Grayber
Vice-Chairs Elmer and Muñoz
Members of the House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards

FR: Graham Trainor, OR AFL-CIO President

RE: *Testimony in Support of SB 916, UI for Striking Workers*

April 30, 2025

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

My name is Graham Trainor and I'm proud to serve as President of the Oregon AFL-CIO, the statewide federation of labor unions representing over 300,000 working people in Oregon and a voice for all workers in the legislative process.

I am honored to be here with some incredible members and leaders this afternoon in support of SB 916 which would repeal the law blocking unemployment benefits for workers on strike. This bill would help ensure that workers are able to stay afloat while fighting for a fair contract.

The first thing I want to make clear: if you were to ask a worker on strike whether or not they want to be there – whether they love being out on a picket line in the January cold and rain instead of serving patients in a hospital, teaching kids in a classroom, doing construction work to make our cities run – and they would tell you no.

Union members are professionals who are dedicated to their craft no matter their sector. You might hear later today that these strikes are voluntary and that workers are simply making a choice. But to call a strike voluntary and to treat workers on strike as if they are getting a break from work is an insult to the thousands of Oregon workers who've fought hard - and will continue to fight hard – to have a meaningful and powerful voice on the job through collective action and union representation.

Strike votes are taken after months of negotiations and are the ultimate democratic process. And far too often, we see that workers' hands are forced by their employer when making the difficult decision to go on strike. And sadly we shouldn't be surprised by that given what's happening in the broader economy: on average CEOs make 272 times more than their employees. C-suites are clocking in record profits all while saying that they simply can't afford to pay workers a living wage, to cover their healthcare or invest in their employees' retirement security.

This is unacceptable and it's ultimately hurting our communities and economy. SB 916 simply and modestly levels the playing field a notch by helping make sure that workers are not starved into a contract that perpetuates the ills of our society at large: corporate greed, unsafe work, and a culture where we are not respecting employees for the work that ultimately makes our society run.

And I want to make two things clear: first, this bill was heavily amended in the Senate to be responsive to the initial goal posts set by much of the opposition. We made a significant compromise in changing the implementation date and changing the waiting period from 1 week to 2 weeks. The vast majority of strikes end within 2 weeks. And again, the Oregon Employment Department projects a less than 1% impact to the UI Trust from this policy.

Second, in interpreting a recent Oregon Supreme Court decision, LC has unequivocally said that this policy is not an unfunded mandate for public sector employers. Public sector workers make up thousands of Oregon's unionized workforce and as such, we have a vested interest in making sure they continue to have their jobs. We just want those jobs to live up to the highest standard of Oregon values – to promote thriving workers and a thriving overall community now and into the future. On this point, the amendment also makes sure that a worker cannot receive both backpay – which is exceedingly rare – *and* UI. So there is no inherent unbudgeted cost to public employers as a result of SB 916.

Finally, we have an opportunity with this policy to show workers that the Oregon legislature has their backs. That legislators can help small businesses thrive *and* help workers survive when they are taking a stand for the betterment of themselves and their community. And make sure we stand strong in our values as Oregonians: That we believe that workers should have a fair chance in negotiations, that they should be able to pay their bills, afford housing and healthcare, retire with dignity, and ultimately be treated with the respect that these professional workers deserve.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and we strongly and proudly urge you to move this bill forward in the process.