

Submitter: Michele Marden  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

My name is Michele. I'm an instructor at Portland Community College and a member of the faculty and academic professional union (PCCFFAP, AFT Local 2278).

I support SB 916 which would repeal the law blocking unemployment benefits to workers on strike. This bill would help ensure that workers are able to stay afloat while fighting for a fair contract.

Over the years, PCC has become management heavy and stopped listening to those closest to the students. At our last bargaining, we very nearly went on strike. Fortunately this did not happen and the college agreed to a decent COLA and several items that helped students - but now, it is becoming more and more clear that they are planning to layoff staff (currently doing so for unprotected positions) and cut programs.

We expect to need to fight to keep services and programs for students - and a decent living wage (meanwhile we keep getting more and more managers who keep getting higher salaries and perks).

When we were close to striking, part-time faculty were especially concerned. They often live on the margins of disaster. It isn't possible to put back savings. Some use our food pantries for groceries.

Some full time faculty and staff have medical conditions that they would need to pay COBRA to continue getting the support they need during a strike and that is cost prohibitive for many even with a decent pay check.

What unemployment insurance benefits would have meant a measure of security to our union colleagues. Striking takes a lot of courage. And when money is a concern, it can sometimes make it just too much- and this prevents needed course corrections that benefit those who need it most.

Ending this exclusion of UI benefits for strikes that go over 7 days will help make sure that workers like me can continue to pay our rent, feed our families, afford prescription drugs or pay our COBRA health care payments while out on strike. This will mean that we aren't forced into an unsafe or unfair contract just because the employer can starve us out. And those UI payments will work as intended: to also put money back into the local economy at times of economic distress.

Strikes are always a measure of absolute last resort. Please help ensure that workers like me – teachers, nurses, grocery and construction workers and so many more – are not forced into unsafe or unfair contracts simply because we can't afford to exercise our legally protected right to strike.

Please vote yes on SB 916.