

From:

Maya Browne,  
Current Striking Nurse,  
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In Re: Testimony in Support of SB 916 and HB 3434

As a striking worker, mother, 20 year Providence nurse veteran, and community advocate in Oregon, I am writing in support of the swift passage of Senate Bill 916 (SB 916) and House Bill 3434 (HB 3434), relative to the following supporting arguments:

#### Economic Stability of Workers and Families

Strikes often result from efforts to secure fair wages, safe working conditions, and reasonable benefits. During these periods, workers face financial hardships due to lost income. Providing unemployment insurance (UI) benefits during strikes would offer essential financial support, enabling workers to meet basic needs such as housing, food, and healthcare. This support is crucial for maintaining the well-being of workers' families during labor disputes.

During strikes, large firms, such as Providence, have access to vast financial resources via capital markets – resources that tip the balance of labor disputes in favor of employers. Workers, with access to limited UI benefits, would help balance the scales of the relative worker employer financial capacities, while maintaining motivation to reach agreement.

#### Alignment with Unemployment Insurance Principles

The primary purpose of the UI system is to provide financial assistance to individuals who are unemployed through no fault of their own. Striking workers, who are advocating for improved workplace conditions, often fall into this category. Extending UI benefits to them aligns with the foundational goals of the program, offering a safety net during periods of employment transition.

#### Encouragement of Fair Negotiations

When employers know that workers have access to UI benefits during strikes, they may be more inclined to engage in fair and timely negotiations. This dynamic can lead to quicker resolutions of labor disputes, benefiting both parties and reducing the duration and economic impact of strikes.

#### Minimal Impact on State Unemployment Insurance Funds

Studies have shown that the cost of extending UI benefits to striking workers is minimal. For instance, in states that have considered similar legislation, the estimated benefits paid to strikers accounted for less than 1% of total statewide UI expenditures. This minimal impact suggests that the financial sustainability of the UI fund would remain intact.

#### Support for Local Economies

Providing UI benefits to striking workers helps maintain their purchasing power, which supports local businesses and economies. When workers can continue to spend on necessities, it prevents economic downturns in communities affected by labor disputes, thereby promoting overall economic stability.

#### Promotion of Social Equity

Access to UI benefits during strikes can help reduce economic disparities, particularly for workers from marginalized communities who may lack sufficient savings to endure prolonged income loss. This support promotes social equity by ensuring that all workers, regardless of their financial background, can stand up for fair labor practices without facing undue economic hardship.

As I continue to watch many of my fellow workers suffer financial difficulties as we move into our fourth week of a senseless strike against our employer - whom has demonstrated no interest in reasonably negotiating with us, myself and my coworkers are convinced the exigent body of evidence suggests that UI benefits would balance the scales of financial motivators between the deep pockets of employers and those of workers. It's time to help our workers overcome this egregious imbalance of power in labor disputes.

Thank you for your prompt consideration.

Sincerely,

Maya Browne, RN