



Testimony in support of SB 916 (2025)

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the Committee,

My name is Kate Suisman. I am an attorney at the Northwest Workers' Justice Project (NWJP). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. We represent workers in low-wage jobs when bad things happen to them at work: when they are not paid, or are discriminated against for being in a protected class or are retaliated against for speaking up. Finally, we engage in policy advocacy and try to bring the important perspectives of workers in low-wage jobs and immigrant workers to these policy discussions.

NWJP strongly supports SB 916 which would allow striking workers to access unemployment benefits. Power in many worksites is weighted heavily towards employers, and workers need some economic support when they make the difficult decision to go on strike.

Because all of our clients are in low-wage jobs, they often have little or no savings to rely on if their paycheck doesn't come in on time. Yet, these are the workers who most need to be able to band together and take action when serious issues come up in their workplaces. And I want to stress that in my decade+ of doing this work, **I have never seen a group of workers go on strike over something frivolous.** Going on strike is a serious decision that requires support from a majority of workers. Workers, especially those in precarious financial situations, are generally not excited to receive about two-thirds of their salary, which is what they receive while on unemployment.

Using [OED's Unemployment Insurance calculator](#), here are the amounts a full-time, minimum wage worker receives while on unemployment:

Geographic area / minimum wage	Usual weekly earnings	Weekly earnings while on unemployment	Weekly loss in wages while on unemployment
Portland Metro at \$15.95	\$638	\$414	\$224
Standard at \$14.70	\$588	\$382	\$206
Rural at \$13.70	\$548	\$356	\$192

I did this exercise to show that workers in low-wage jobs have no financial incentive to go on strike, and making this decision is always a sacrifice. If you have ever lived on a minimum wage job, imagine the tough choices you would have had to make if your weekly income went down by about a third.

This is also true for higher wage earners. A person making the average 2023 Oregon salary of \$68,283 based on the [Oregon Blue Book](#) would receive \$836 a week instead of their usual \$1,313- a highly significant difference.

Another angle to consider is *why* workers make this tough decision. The recent strike at Providence Health Care was based on patient safety and dangerously low staffing levels, among other issues. The Mondelez/Nabisco strike of 2021 was based on many issues, but outsourcing of local jobs overseas was a big one and workers felt they needed to strike to preserve these U.S. jobs. (And I don't think a single member of this committee is in favor of sending local jobs to other countries.) Amazon workers around the country have gone on strike to fight against dangerous productivity quotas and sky-high injury rates.

As the National Employment Law Project testified at the 2/6/2025 public hearing on this bill, states that already allow striking workers to receive unemployment do not have higher rates of strikes. The sky will not fall if you pass this bill. The sky will just be a tiny bit brighter for workers in dire workplace situations. I urge your yes vote.

Thank you.