

RE: Support for SB 916

To the Senate Committee On Labor and Business,

As the sole provider for my family, being without an income for nearly a month has been an immense challenge, placing a significant financial strain on my ability to cover basic necessities such as rent, utilities, and groceries. This hardship has created uncertainty and forced me to make difficult decisions about how to manage my limited resources. I never anticipated finding myself in this position, particularly given the critical demand for nurses in our healthcare system. It is deeply ironic that, while there is a severe nursing shortage, we are compelled to strike rather than using our skills to provide patient care. However, I cannot, in good conscience, work under unsafe conditions that jeopardize patient well-being. Nursing is not just a profession to me—it's a calling to improve lives and ensure the highest standards of care. Unfortunately, the financial hardship resulting from this situation only exacerbates the challenges we face, reinforcing the urgent need for change.

Striking is a recognized tool for workers to negotiate better wages, safer conditions, and improved benefits. However, when strikes extend beyond a brief period—specifically, longer than seven days—the financial repercussions on workers become increasingly severe. Granting unemployment benefits during these extended strikes is not only a humane policy decision but also one that is economically and socially sound. Extended strikes place workers in a precarious financial situation, depriving them of their primary source of income. Providing unemployment benefits during these prolonged strikes helps stabilize household finances, ensuring that workers can meet basic needs such as housing, food, and healthcare, thus reducing the risk of poverty and homelessness. Additionally, maintaining workers' spending power helps prevent economic downturns, as local businesses and communities are less likely to suffer from reduced economic activity.

Strikes are a fundamental component of collective bargaining—one of the core pillars of labor rights. Denying unemployment benefits to striking workers undermines these rights by imposing financial penalties for exercising the right to protest and negotiate. This discourages workers from engaging in collective bargaining, weakening their negotiating positions. In contrast, providing a financial

safety net allows workers to negotiate from a position of strength, leading to more balanced and sustainable labor agreements. Furthermore, unemployment benefits contribute to a more stable and resilient labor market by smoothing transitions and preventing long-term unemployment, particularly for workers in industries susceptible to cyclical downturns.

Unemployment benefits also serve as a societal safeguard that promotes fairness and equality. By ensuring that striking workers receive support, society can mitigate the disproportionate impact of labor disputes on lower-income workers who may otherwise lack sufficient financial resources. Moreover, when employers are aware that striking workers will not be left destitute, negotiations are more likely to be conducted in good faith, with both sides recognizing the shared responsibility of sustaining a healthy labor environment. Providing unemployment benefits also fosters a more engaged and stable democratic society by empowering workers to participate in democratic processes without the fear of economic ruin, reinforcing the notion that all citizens have the right to have their voices heard. Economic hardship is a well-known catalyst for social instability, and ensuring a safety net for striking workers reduces the risk of long-term societal discontent and the potential for broader economic crises.

As healthcare workers, we require safe working conditions to ensure the safety and well-being of our patients. When these conditions are compromised, patient outcomes suffer significantly, creating a stressful and unsafe environment that jeopardizes both our professional licenses and the quality of care provided. Moreover, inadequate working conditions drive highly qualified healthcare professionals out of the industry, erode public trust in the medical system, and deter individuals from seeking or providing medical care. This issue extends beyond individual employees—it affects the entire healthcare system, our communities, and society as a whole. Quality patient care is intrinsically linked to the quality of the working environment, and when employers face no consequences for failing to maintain appropriate conditions and benefits, large profit-driven institutions prioritize financial gains over the well-being of staff and patients. This lack of accountability undermines the core principles of compassion and professionalism in healthcare.

Hospitals already generate significant profits, and it is imperative that they be held accountable for providing a safe and supportive environment for both their employees and patients. The strain of working under substandard conditions,

compounded by the financial hardship experienced during strikes prompted by these failures, disrupts the lives of healthcare workers and negatively impacts patient care and the broader community. It is essential to uphold high standards within healthcare institutions to ensure the delivery of quality care and to support the dedicated professionals who make it possible. Extending unemployment benefits to workers engaged in strikes lasting more than seven days is a policy that recognizes the critical role of collective bargaining in a healthy labor market. By mitigating financial hardship, protecting workers' rights, enhancing market stability, promoting social equity, and encouraging democratic engagement, such a policy not only serves individual workers but benefits society as a whole. In the pursuit of a fair and balanced labor market, it is both reasonable and necessary to support striking workers with unemployment benefits during extended labor disputes.

Thank you for accepting my testimony and I look forward to your support.

Oregon Nurse