



Oregon School Employees Association

www.osea.org

State Office: 4735 Liberty Road S, Salem, OR 97302-5036 P: 800-

February 9, 2025

Senate Committee on Business and Labor

Sen. Kathleen Taylor, Chair

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Cassidy Kotter, Government Relations Specialist for the Oregon School Employees Association. On behalf of the over 25,000 classified staff we represent, in all 36 Oregon counties in all levels of Oregon public education, including Head Start programs, K-12 school districts, education service districts, special districts like parks and rec, and community colleges, thank you for the opportunity to testify in regard to SB 916.

OSEA is in support of SB 916, which would repeal the current law prohibiting workers from receiving unemployment insurance (UI) while on strike.

At OSEA, our members very rarely strike. In fact, although we bargain 138 contracts across the state of Oregon, our members have only **gone on strike once** in the **87 years** since our association's establishment in **1938**. This speaks in great part to the fundamentally unequal power dynamic that exists between school districts negotiating contracts with members and our classified workers. Unemployment benefits equate to only a small fraction of what are already poverty wages. Weekly unemployment benefits are calculated to 1.25% of your base period pay with a \$151/week minimum and \$652/week maximum benefit. Our members make roughly \$33,000/year. That means that even *with* unemployment benefits, OSEA members wouldn't be capable of surviving off unemployment insurance for any sustained period of time. UI benefits for folks making the wages OSEA members do would likely only stretch so far as to cover a power bill or a trip to the grocery store. Because school districts know our members cannot afford to strike, this unequal power dynamic continues to be perpetuated when it comes to securing truly fair contracts for workers. Our members are thus forced into accepting contracts that may not serve them because striking would mean an almost complete loss of livelihood. Allowing striking workers to collect unemployment insurance is a crucial step toward creating a power balance that is more equitable between our members and school districts.

When all other avenues towards addressing challenges in schools, whether they be understaffing, safety concerns, inadequate resources, etc., have been exhausted, strikes become inevitable. When these breakdowns in negotiations occur and lead to the difficult



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decision to strike, it is crucial that workers have a safeguard to cover at least a portion of their financial obligations.

SB 916 would provide a temporary safety net for all workers willing to sacrifice their pay for the improvement of the systems they work within. This bill would not lead to the normalization or encouragement of strikes. Rather, it would show Oregonians that the state recognizes the critical role workers play in shaping our everyday lives. As a reminder, because of how UI benefits are calculated, OSEA members wouldn't be capable of surviving off unemployment. However, UI *could* keep food in the house, keep the lights on, or put gas in the car, and when our workers are already attempting to live off low wages, *any* cushioning makes a difference.

We urge your support for SB 916. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of our state's classified educators.

Sincerely,

Cassidy Kotter

OSEA, Government Relations Specialist