

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

My name is Elyse and I'm a state worker and a member of SEIU 503 union. 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.

There are many reasons that unions go on strike during contract negotiations. As we saw during the last bargaining cycle in 2023, it is possible our state workers would take things there if they felt necessary again. State workers are currently fighting for fair wages. This has continuously come up as the number one issue year after year. Many of our state workers do not have stable living situations, are home insecure, or houseless already. Unemployment benefits could support their collective strength while also helping to maintain their current life situations.

It is important to note, though, that state workers have not gone on strike in many years. However, we have see a resurgence in the labor movement. Many more labor unions are reaching strikes during contract negotiations. With or without unemployment benefits - the workers are striking (a worst case, last straw effort). No union goes into negotiations ready to strike. The vote only happens at the last moment when every effort has been put in to reach a tentative agreement.

Unemployment benefits do not initially impact an employer when we see one or two claims come through. However, in the case of a labor union going to strike and many unemployment claims coming through, an employer will see that make a dent. This will add another laying to the urgency of reaching a tentative agreement on their part. No workers WANT to strike. And I know for certain that my colleagues love their jobs. They do not strike as a means of a vacation away from everything. Instead, we are looking for protections so we can maintain our dignity (as part of ORS 661.020 labor is not a commodity) and continue to be seen for out humanity.

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 – nurses, teachers, 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.