

County Commissioners
Danielle Bethell, Chair
Colm Willis
Kevin Cameron



**Chief Administrative
Officer**
Jan Fritz

MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

February 11, 2025

Chair Senator Kathleen Taylor
Vice-Chair Daniel Bonham
Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 916

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee,

The Marion County Board of Commissioners writes to express our strong opposition to Senate Bill 916, which proposes to extend unemployment insurance benefits to individuals whose unemployment is due to an active labor dispute at their place of employment. While we respect the right of workers to advocate for improved wages and conditions, we believe this bill would have serious financial and economic consequences for public employers, private businesses, and Oregon's unemployment insurance system.

If enacted, SB 916 would significantly alter the balance of labor negotiations by subsidizing striking workers with unemployment benefits, funds that are traditionally reserved for individuals who have lost employment through no fault of their own. Unlike layoffs, which are unforeseen and involuntary, labor strikes are planned actions that are part of a collective bargaining strategy. Allowing striking workers to receive unemployment benefits risks prolonging labor disputes, increasing the financial burden on employers and potentially causing disruptions to essential public services, small businesses, and supply chains.

SB 916 would impose substantial costs on public agencies and private businesses by increasing the amount paid into the state's unemployment insurance trust fund. Oregon's Employment Department has estimated that the bill would cost an additional \$5.3 million in unemployment payments in the first biennium alone. Public employers, who directly reimburse the state for benefits paid to their former employees, would face increased costs estimated at \$3.5 million, diverting resources away from essential services such as education, public safety, and infrastructure.

At a time when local governments and businesses are grappling with tight budgets, these additional expenses would place further strain on employers who already face rising costs for wages, benefits, and regulatory compliance. This could lead to higher taxes, service reductions, or even layoffs, the very scenario that unemployment benefits are meant to mitigate.


Marion County relies on a stable workforce to deliver critical services to residents, including law enforcement, emergency response, and public health programs. If SB 916 becomes law, it could create longer and more frequent strikes, leading to service disruptions that impact our most vulnerable residents. A prolonged work stoppage in sectors such as healthcare, public safety, or transportation could result in delays in emergency response, school closures, and economic instability for businesses and families.

Oregon would become one of the few states in the nation to allow striking workers to access unemployment benefits after just one week, setting a precedent that could deter business investment and job growth. While some states, such as New York and New Jersey, have adopted limited versions of this policy, others, including California, have rejected similar proposals due to concerns about cost and economic impact. Oregon's unemployment insurance trust fund is designed to provide financial relief to workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own, not to subsidize labor disputes.

For these reasons, the Marion County Board of Commissioners urges you to vote against Senate Bill 916. The bill would increase costs for public and private employers, prolong labor disputes, disrupt essential services, and threaten the long-term stability of Oregon's unemployment insurance system. Instead of shifting financial responsibility to taxpayers and businesses, we encourage policymakers to focus on solutions that promote fair and efficient labor negotiations without unintended economic consequences.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate your leadership on these important issues and welcome the opportunity to further discuss our concerns.

Sincerely,



Danielle Bethell
Chair



Colm Willis
Commissioner



Kevin Cameron
Commissioner