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Dear Oregon Legislators-

Opposition to Senate Bill 916

Senate Bill 916, which proposes allowing striking workers to receive unemployment insurance during a strike, presents significant concerns for school districts, students, and the responsible management of public education funds. While the bill's proponents argue that it would encourage quicker contract resolutions, there is substantial risk that it could have the opposite effect—prolonging strikes, increasing district costs, and negatively impacting student learning.

Impact on Student Instructional Time

One of the most critical consequences of SB 916 is its potential to **extend the duration of labor strikes**. If striking employees have access to unemployment benefits, there may be less financial pressure to return to work, increasing the likelihood of prolonged work stoppages. This directly impacts students, as instructional time is lost, extracurricular programs suffer, and overall educational continuity is disrupted. Given the lengthy strikes that have already affected Oregon's schools in recent years, the risk of more frequent or prolonged strikes is too significant to ignore.

Financial Burden on School Districts

SB 916 could introduce unintended financial burdens on school districts. Districts may find themselves paying for striking employees' unemployment benefits while also negotiating backpay for missed workdays once a contract is settled. Without clear mechanisms in place to prevent **double compensation**, schools may be forced to divert funds away from critical classroom resources, teacher support, and student programs. These additional costs could lead to budget shortfalls that ultimately harm the very students public education is meant to serve.

Administrative Challenges and Increased Costs

The implementation of SB 916 raises logistical concerns for both the Oregon Employment Department and school districts. Current statutes prohibit employers from reducing backpay due to unemployment insurance claims, which means additional administrative oversight would be required to ensure employees are not being paid twice for strike-related absences. The **increased staff time** needed to reconcile these payments would further strain district resources and divert attention away from educational priorities.

Potential Incentive for More Frequent Strikes

By allowing striking workers to claim unemployment benefits, SB 916 may unintentionally **incentivize more frequent and prolonged strikes**. Labor negotiations should be balanced, with both parties having an interest in reaching a fair and timely resolution. Providing unemployment benefits during strikes could tip

the scales, creating an uneven playing field where unions have less incentive to engage in good-faith negotiations that prioritize student outcomes.

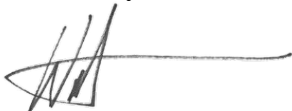
Recommended Amendments and Considerations

If SB 916 moves forward (which I hope it doesn't), several safeguards should be implemented to mitigate its negative impact on students and school districts:

1. **Extended Waiting Period for Unemployment Benefits:** Instead of the standard one-week waiting period for unemployment claims, a minimum three-week waiting period should be required for those striking to ensure benefits are not prematurely awarded before negotiations can progress.
2. **Delayed Implementation Until the Employment Department is Fully Prepared:** The bill should not take effect until the Oregon Employment Department has the capacity to prevent double compensation and ensure seamless administration.
3. **Application Only to Future Negotiations:** SB 916 should not retroactively apply to ongoing bargaining, as changing the rules mid-negotiation could disrupt current labor discussions.
4. **Explicit Language to Prevent Double Compensation:** Clear statutory language must be included to prevent employees from receiving both unemployment insurance and full backpay, ensuring school districts do not bear undue financial burdens.

While supporting fair labor practices is important, SB 916 creates more problems than it solves for Oregon's school districts, students, and taxpayers. The risk of prolonged strikes, financial strain on schools, and administrative complications makes this bill untenable without significant revisions. Our focus should remain on policies that protect student learning, ensure fiscal responsibility, and promote equitable labor negotiations without compromising public education. We urge legislators to reconsider SB 916 and prioritize solutions that support both educators and students without undermining the stability of our schools.

Thank you,



Walt Davenport
Superintendent