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

I urge lawmakers to pass Senate Bill 916 to support striking workers in Oregon.

When we went on strike last year, I was on medication that would have cost over a thousand dollars a month without health insurance. The threat of losing that even briefly was absolutely terrifying. Luckily, our employer never threatened to cut our health insurance, but they were under their rights to. Being on strike with your livelihood on the line is scary. Being on strike with your livelihood AND your health on the line is downright terrifying.

Right now, employees may cave to a bad contract because they are scared for their own health or the health of their dependents. Providing unemployment benefits so that striking workers have a lifeline would be a fundamental shift -- employees would feel empowered to strike until they feel a fair contract is reached, not due to a fundamental need to care for their own well-being. It's a leveling of the playing field that is long overdue.

Workers strike only after every other option has been exhausted. In many cases, they continue working under expired contracts for months or years, making sacrifices because they care about their jobs. SB 916 is a simple, fair measure to ensure that when workers must strike, they don't face total financial devastation.

Employers often use healthcare benefits as a weapon in labor disputes. Cutting off healthcare during a strike puts workers and their families in an impossible situation. Unemployment benefits are a reasonable safeguard that will prevent workers from falling into crisis while they stand up for fair wages and conditions.

This bill is low-cost, does not significantly impact employers, and would result in shorter strikes and fairer contracts. Oregon should pass SB 916 and support its workers.