

Submitter: JoDee Hunter

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

I am submitting testimony in support of Senate Bill 916 to end the exclusion of Unemployment Insurance benefits for workers when they are on strike in Oregon.

I have been a nurse for fifteen years but I have only been employed with Providence for the past 1.5 years. In that short period of time, we have been on strike TWICE! Both times my employer received notice that our bargaining team intended to strike, my employer refused to negotiate any further reporting that "they needed to focus on patient safety and prepare for the strike". This places nurses in a position where we are inevitably going on strike because we know that our employer isn't even willing to discuss avoiding a strike. The most recent strike kept us away from the hospital (and the bedside) for 48 days. That was a VERY stressful time for each of the nurses who chose to go on strike. Each knowing that their household depended on the income and that there was no telling how or when we would return to work.

As a single person, living in Portland with a significant housing cost, I was placed in a very precarious situation where I had no one to rely on to replace that income. I had to see kemployment with staffing agencies and perform duties I was unfamiliar with in order to pay my bills. This placed my nursing license (and future livelihood) at risk. I worked any shift available, days/eves/night and left my life in chaos all while trying to support my coworkers on the strike line. I have been a steady worker for my entire adult life and have paid into the unemployment program for the past 23 years that I have lived in Oregon. If SB916 should pass successfully, if I was forced to go on strike to advocate for safe practices and protect patient safety, I would no longer be placed in a situation where I had no idea how I was going to support myself for I would be eligible to apply for unemployment to help me during that difficult time.

Executives in offices continue to draw a paycheck while workers are on strike. They are not faced with using food banks to get food for their families during a strike. They continue to live with the exact same income. Allowing striking workers to be eligible for unemployment would help level this power imbalance slightly because striking workers could chose to return to work when they had a fair negotiation that affords patient safety versus needing to cross a picket line or accept a less than fair solution because the money ran out and they were facing the lose of house and home. This bill is just and helps to provide fairness amongst working people. While on strike, I am not allowed to work by my employer's choosing because THEY dictate when they are willing to negotiate. It is not entirely volitional for me to be on strike because my nursing oath demands that I advocate for patient safety and the only way that happens, sometimes, is through withholding our labor.

Please consider supporting striking workers as they work to have the voice of the working class heard for better working conditions. These improvements are good for Oregon people and SB916 helps to make Oregon a safer and better place to live and work. Thank you for your support.