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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.

We went on strike after many negotiations with the administrators. We felt that they were not bargaining in good faith. Patient safety, adequate medical insurance, competitive salary, sick/vacation time,...were some of the issues needing to be addressed and improved upon. After experiencing a long period of losing nurses to better paying hospitals it has become evident that we needed to offer more competitive wages. With less than needed nurses patient care suffers. We see this as unfair to both the patients and the nurses.
Nurses and medical staff never want to strike.

Strikes are never easy. Everybody suffers. If SB916 passes there may be fewer/no strikes. Administration would know that the field is little more balanced when it comes to negotiating before/during a strike. With that in mind it would eliminate some of the jockeying that seems to prolong negotiations/strikes. SB916 would be a win for everyone.

Strikes are never the first choice for workers—they are the last resort after exhausting all other options. Often, workers continue showing up under expired contracts for months or even years because they care about their jobs and their communities. But when an employer refuses to bargain in good faith, workers sometimes have no choice but to strike. SB 916 is a commonsense policy that ensures striking workers can still afford necessities like rent, groceries, and healthcare.

Employers already hold significant leverage in these situations, and many use tactics like cutting healthcare benefits to pressure workers back to the table. If employers can take away healthcare, then workers should have the right to access unemployment benefits. UI is not a full paycheck—it is a partial wage replacement that allows workers to survive while they fight for fair contracts.

This policy comes at an extremely low cost to the UI fund and has minimal impact on employers. In the rare cases of public sector strikes, the ability to access UI benefits will make a meaningful difference for workers
Passing SB 916 will lead to fairer negotiations, shorter strikes, and a more balanced bargaining process. Oregon workers deserve this basic protection.