

Submitter: Haley Milam

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

“Time and time again during contract negotiations, we see that workers’ hands are forced by their employer when making the difficult decision to go on strike,” Oregon AFL-CIO President Graham Trainor said in an editorial to the Northwest Labor Press.

“...It will ensure that workers have a fair shot in negotiations,” Trainor added. “And that they’re able to pay their bills, afford housing and healthcare, and stay afloat while fighting for a fair contract.”

Though the bill faces opposition from employers, the data is in labor’s corner. Research from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found that this bill will have negligible cost increases for the state.

Strikes that extend beyond seven days, triggering unemployment benefits, would be unlikely based on historical strike lengths in Oregon — the median duration being five days since 2020, according to the Cornell University ILR School Labor Action Tracker.

Folding striking workers into unemployment insurance (UI) eligibility, is a low cost way to close the power gap between workers and employers at the bargaining table.

“We believe passing this critical piece of legislation will encourage employers to engage more earnestly at the bargaining table,” Trainor said in his editorial. “It could also reduce the frequency and duration of strikes, which has been the experience in other states that already have this policy on the books.”

Oregon would be the third state to offer UI to striking workers, with many other states also trying to pass this type of policy in 2025, including Washington and California..

The bill is shaping up to be hugely popular among workers, with hundreds of testimonies in favor of the bill grossly outweighing opposition.

Donna Marks, a twenty-year employee of Nabisco/Mondelez in Portland and a member of BCTGM Local 364 who went on strike for 43 days in 2021, highlighted the difficult position many workers face when striking:

“To say this was a choice would be false: the choice was really between staying in an unsafe job where we were forced to work days and weeks on end, or to quit and allow a new worker to be subjected to that same treatment – all while the company made record-breaking profits,” said Marks. “Most of my co-workers and I were forced to take a second job during the strike. I worked as a delivery driver, meaning that between the strike

line and the delivery job I was working 60 hours a week just so I could continue to make ends meet.”

This bill is particularly timely for Providence nurses, who are currently on strike.

“We did not want to strike but we have been forced into this situation by an extremely rich and powerful employer,” Emily, a currently striking registered nurse at Providence wrote. “At this time, striking is the only way we can demand to be treated fairly and fight for what our patients deserve. Ultimately, all we want to do is provide our patients with the best care possible while also being able to take care of ourselves in the process and not have to worry about affording our mortgage, rent, childcare, health insurance, etc.”

Brandon Bryant, President DBR of District W24 of the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers, echoed these sentiments in their testimony.

“Corporations never, if rarely, just willingly give employees their best offer, workers have to fight them for every penny that they deserve,” Bryant said. “There is a power imbalance in our economy, where businesses hold all the cards, and workers are left to scrape and claw back just enough for them to survive. This power imbalance shows up even more so during a strike, where corporations can outlast or starve out workers to make them settle for less. This bill helps to level that imbalance.”

At the Employment Department Directors make 293% what an average worker

makes. They still get COLA's and the health benefits we bargain for. Help us fight for living wages so that our safety net isn't gutted by privation.