

Submitter: John Musick

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

My name is John Musick . I am a Paraeducator in Portland Public Schools and a member of the Portland Federation of School Professionals (PFSP). I support SB 916 which would repeal the law blocking unemployment benefits to workers on strike. This bill would help ensure that workers are able to stay afloat while fighting for a fair contract.

Last year, PFSP was in contract negotiations with Portland Public Schools for a new contract spanning 2023-2026. Our negotiations took place after the Teacher's strike, which kept PPS schools closed for 3 weeks. Our demands during negotiations were simple, that we be paid fairly for the critical work that we do with students and that our safety be prioritized by the district. Many Paraeducators work multiple jobs to pay rent and almost every Paraeducator in PPS has been kicked, hit, bitten and/or spit on, myself included. If it hadn't been for the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) strike just weeks before our own contract negotiations we almost certainly would have gone on strike ourselves. Striking would have been extremely trying, if not impossible for myself and my family. The financial cost of a protracted strike could have had irreparable financial consequences. This reality has a massive chilling effect on worker's unions and disproportionately impacts workers who get paid the least. Hard working people should not have to choose between starving or losing their homes, and fighting for fair treatment in the workplace.

Ending this exclusion of UI benefits for strikes that go over 7 days will help make sure that workers like me can continue to pay our rent, feed our families, afford prescription drugs or pay our COBRA health care payments while out on strike. This will mean that we aren't forced into an unsafe or unfair contract just because the employer can starve us out. And those UI payments will work as intended: to also put money back into the local economy at times of economic distress.

Strikes are always a measure of absolute last resort. Please help ensure that workers like me – nurses, teachers, grocery and construction workers and so many more – are not forced into unsafe or unfair contracts simply because we can't afford to exercise our legally protected right to strike. Please vote yes on SB 916.

Thank you for your consideration,

John Musick