

2/13/2025

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 916

To the Senate Committee on Labor and Business:

I am writing to express my support for SB 916. This bill would make workers who are engaged in an active labor dispute with their employer eligible for unemployment benefits.

I became a nurse because I love helping people and love the practice of medicine. Throughout the 18 years of my nursing career, I have dedicated myself to taking care of patients physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. I have given my heart, soul, sweat, and tears to help our community members during some of the worst times in their lives. I have seen thousands of patients recover and return home to their loved ones. I have also seen many patients die and have been at the bedside of patients taking their last breaths. I have comforted patients and their family and friends during challenging and scary times and have celebrated good days, good news, and discharges home. I have helped thousands of patients at the start of their cancer treatment and have been there to celebrate many patients successfully beating cancer. I have worked with thousands of patients who suffer from life-long autoimmune diseases that require frequent treatments and as such have treated and gotten the opportunity to know many patients for years, some as long as 10 years. As nurses we do so much more than treat the physical ailments of our patients. We help patients, and their family and friends, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. As nurses we are constantly putting the needs of our patients above ourselves. I have missed many holidays and family events while working. I have come home from work innumerable times exhausted physically, mentally, and emotionally. Then gone back the next day to do it all again. While taking care of patients, I have had two work injuries and taken care of innumerable patients with communicable diseases. I took care of patients through a once-in-lifetime pandemic where we were constantly worried about not only the health and safety of our patients, but the health and safety of ourselves and our loved ones. I put my own health on the line during the pandemic to continue to care for patients because I love taking care of people.

In order to be able to provide safe and excellent patient care, nurses need to have the appropriate level of support, including appropriate staffing based on patient acuity. When acuity levels are not considered for staffing it jeopardizes patient care and at times patients' lives. Nurses also need to be able to take care of themselves during their shifts which includes getting appropriate breaks and lunches. We also need quality and

affordable healthcare to be able to take care of ourselves and our loved ones, so that we can continue to take care of patients. Nurses get sick or injured too and when we don't have access to or can't afford the healthcare we need, we are not able to be there for our patients and our community. Nurses need to have adequate paid sick time, so we do not get behind on bills and daily expenses when we do need to call in sick. We also need time off from work to rest, recover, and spend time with our loved ones. We cannot do this without adequate paid time off (PTO). Our sick time and vacation time come from the same pot. So, if we are sick with illnesses or injuries that last a long time or that we can get repeatedly, like covid, we may not have enough PTO left to take time off with our loved ones. This affects our health in every way and makes it harder for us to be able to care for our patients. As one of the 5000 healthcare workers currently in a labor dispute that led to a strike at Providence hospitals across Oregon, these are the things for which we are fighting.

A strike is not something healthcare workers ever want to do. We want to be at work taking care of people. Choosing to strike is an extremely difficult decision and not one we make lightly. However, when we feel that we are not getting the above mentioned necessities to be able to adequately care for our patients and ourselves, and bargaining with our employer has not led to the necessary changes, we make the difficult decision to strike and fight for these things, for the sake of our patients, our community, and ourselves. We strike to fight for safe staffing and other lack of resources, unfair labor practices, as well as the benefits we need to be able to care for ourselves and our loved ones so that we can continue to care for our community. Oregonians deserve safe and excellent healthcare, and that requires healthcare providers who are cared for at and outside of work to be at their best. A strike is incredibly difficult on healthcare workers. It is exhausting in every way possible, and it is extremely challenging financially. Financial constraints often force healthcare workers to cross the picket line to continue to make ends meet, even if the needs they are asking for have still not been met by the employer. We don't want to cross the picket line if we absolutely don't have to, we want to continue to fight for what we need to take care of our patients. Additionally, when an employer like Providence cares more about profits than patients and those taking care of patients, and does not bargain in good faith, it draws out the strike and making ends meet gets increasingly more difficult for the striking healthcare workers. To this end, having access unemployment benefits during a strike would be immensely helpful. It would help relieve the financial burden on healthcare workers during a strike and help make it possible for them to continue to fight for the needs of their patients, communities, and themselves, and not be forced to accept unsafe work conditions which cause patient care to suffer. As such, I support SB 916 which would provide healthcare workers, who are currently ineligible for unemployment benefits during a strike, with the help they need during a strike. I strongly urge you to support this bill that

allows healthcare workers access to the resources they need during a strike so they can continue the fight for better working conditions leading to safe patient care. Access to these resources can help healthcare workers avoid having to make an impossible decision between fighting for patient safety and caring for their own basic needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. I look forward to your support.

Melissa Johnson, RN, BSN, CMSRN, OCN