Submitter:                              Tyler Swafford

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.

In my experience, employers often use financial fear tactics to pressure union employees into accepting contracts that do not align with their interests. Implementing unemployment benefits for striking workers would provide employees with financial security and peace of mind during negotiations. This support is essential for the well-being of workers' families. Given the inherent stress and financial strain associated with negotiations and strikes, the passage of this bill would significantly ease these burdens.

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.