



Crook County

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February 27, 2025

Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 916

Dear Senator McLane and Representative Breese-Iverson,

I'm reaching out from Crook County where I serve as Commissioner to express our steadfast opposition to Senate Bill 916, which aims to qualify public employees for unemployment insurance during labor disputes or strikes. Representing our rural community, it's clear the fiscal impacts this bill would have on county governments across Oregon are severe, and our community would be hit hard.

Unlike businesses that might find ways to adjust, our county budgets simply can't handle the abrupt financial demands this bill imposes. We'd be looking at reimbursing the state's unemployment fund dollar-for-dollar for every benefit paid out, which would severely stretch our already tight resources. The emergency clause in this bill would make these changes kick in during the tail end of our 2024-2025 fiscal year, a time when we're least prepared to tackle these new financial burdens.

We've crunched the numbers, and if SB 916 passes, we're facing an additional \$15,000 per week in expenditures. To cover these costs, essential services like our Sheriff, Jail Services, Public Health, and even Wildfire Response might face cuts. These are the services that keep our folks safe and healthy, and any reduction here could have serious, even life-threatening consequences.

Furthermore, the bill's current setup with a one-week waiting period for benefits seems likely to encourage longer strikes, adding more strain on our public coffers. And remember, we can't just raise property taxes to cover these unexpected costs.

With a tough budget year ahead in 2025-2026, it's critical we look after the long-term financial health of Crook County and the essential services we provide. Senate Bill 916 threatens to undercut these efforts significantly. Our community depends on each dollar to support the services that keep our way of life intact—from the safety of our roads to the health of our families. We are stewards of our taxpayers' hard-earned money, and this bill would challenge our ability to fulfill that responsibility.

I urge you to oppose SB 916 and to consider the deep and damaging effects it would have on public employers and the communities we serve. Thank you for giving this urgent matter the serious attention it needs, and for supporting the well-being and sustainability of rural Oregon.

Sincerely,


Brian Barney
County Commissioner