

Submitter: Debra Blanchard  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

I strongly support Senate Bill 916 because it will end the exclusion of Unemployment Insurance benefits for workers when they are on strike.

In 1987 I worked for an electric utility in Alaska that was covered under a collective bargaining. We had been in negotiations for 2 years and were still without a successor collective bargaining agreement (CBA). After much reflection and considering the pros and cons, our bargaining unit made the heart-breaking decision to go out on strike. We were on strike for 66 days. It was an incredibly tough and painful experience. During that time, there was no income--folks lost their homes, families broke up--it was hard times. The emotional, financial, and personal strain of being out of strike for that long was immense. The weight of not being able to provide for our loved ones was so heavy. We all wanted to go back to work because we were good workers, but we also wanted fair wages and benefits. It was a hard fight, but eventually we returned to work, but the damage was done - it took years for us to recover not only financially, but with trust and morale. Not only for us, the employees, but for the employer as well. I wouldn't wish what we had to go through on my own worst enemy.

Workers don't go on strike lightly. By the time a strike happens, employees have often spent weeks, months, or even years negotiating in good faith. Many continue working under expired contracts because they believe in their work and need to pay their bills. SB 916 is a simple, fair policy that will prevent striking workers from falling into financial crisis.

Employers have the power to strip healthcare benefits from striking workers, leaving them with impossible choices. UI is a partial wage replacement, not a full paycheck, but it will allow workers to stay in their homes, keep their lights on, and avoid financial ruin.

This policy has minimal costs to the UI system and to employers, but it would make a world of difference to working families. Passing SB 916 ensures workers can bargain fairly without being starved into accepting bad deals.

Oregon should stand up for working people by passing this bill.