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

Oregon's public workers deserve a fair shot at the bargaining table. When employers refuse to engage in good faith, the only tool workers have left is to strike; that tool shouldn't be limited to only those who can afford to go without pay. SB 916 gives working families the ability to stand up for fair treatment without risking financial ruin. It's a matter of basic fairness and equity in our labor system.

By allowing workers on strike to access Unemployment Insurance benefits, SB 916 helps level the playing field during labor disputes, especially when negotiations are stalled because of employer inaction. Right now, I'm serving as a bargaining delegate for the Human Services Coalition, which represents thousands of SEIU 503 members across the Employment Department, Department of Human Services, and Oregon Health Authority. We've submitted more than 20 proposals on core issues like safety, workload, and equity. Management has responded to just one of them—and offered zero proposals of their own.

We've come to the table in good faith, but our ability to negotiate fairly is undermined when one side refuses to engage. Workers shouldn't be forced to choose between standing up for themselves and paying the bills. SB 916 ensures that when workers are pushed to strike, they have the same safety net we extend to people who lose work for other reasons.

I urge you to pass SB 916. This bill doesn't encourage strikes, rather it ensures that when they become necessary, they are an option for all workers, not just the most financially secure. And in the public sector, a stronger voice for workers means stronger, more sustainable services for the people of Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.