



May 1, 2025

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Elmer & Munoz, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Phoenix-Talent School District, I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to SB 916A, which would allow striking workers to collect unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. While the bill may be intended to provide financial relief during labor disputes, it introduces significant and unintended consequences—particularly for public school districts and the students and families we serve.

By extending UI benefits to individuals engaged in a strike, SB 916A risks prolonging work stoppages that might otherwise be resolved more swiftly. In public education, extended strikes have direct and detrimental effects on students—resulting in lost instructional time, disrupted services, and delayed academic progress. Extracurricular programs suffer, student engagement declines, and overall educational continuity is disrupted. At a time when our educators are working hard to re-engage students and strengthen learning outcomes, the last thing we need is a policy that increases the likelihood and duration of classroom disruptions.

The bill also fails to account for the significant financial fallout that school districts would face beyond the strike itself. At Phoenix-Talent School District, a small, rural district with approximately 140 licensed staff, the cost of covering substitute teachers for a full 26-week strike (which SB 916A would permit), at the current rate of \$272 per day, would exceed \$4.95 million. While that represents a worst-case scenario, it is a real possibility under this policy. Even using Oregon's average strike duration of 8.6 weeks, or 43 instructional days, the cost of substitute coverage alone would still surpass \$1.6 million. These figures reflect only licensed staff within our district and do not include costs for classified employees or the broader disruptions to school operations.

These financial consequences are not hypothetical—they are foreseeable and significant. Yet they are not reflected in the bill's fiscal impact statement. For a district like Phoenix-Talent, where every dollar is carefully allocated, an unanticipated cost of this magnitude would force us to divert funding away from core academic programs, student support services, and enrichment opportunities like music, athletics, and career and technical education. These are vital to our mission and student success.

In addition to these costs, SB 916A introduces administrative burdens that fall directly on school districts. The process of deducting UI benefits from future employee wages, required to ensure that employees do not receive more than 100% of their compensation when both UI benefits and back pay are awarded, is expected to have a significant administrative impact. **As noted in the Legislative Fiscal Office analysis, this impact will depend on the number of affected employees, but the responsibility to manage and reconcile these deductions will rest with each school district, adding complexity, additional financial burden and risk to already strained administrations.**



We support fair labor negotiations and respect the rights of our employees. But SB 916A shifts the balance in a way that makes timely resolution of disputes less likely, increases taxpayer costs, and harms our students—the very individuals our education system is meant to protect.

For these reasons, we urge you to oppose SB 916A.

Sincerely,

Brent Barry

Phoenix-Talent School District, Superintendent