



Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Cynthia Branger Muñoz on behalf of the Oregon Education Association (OEA), which represents over 42,000 educators and education service professionals across the state, spanning pre-K through our community colleges. Our members include teachers, bus drivers, custodians, teacher assistants, nutrition specialists, community college faculty and staff, and many others who work tirelessly to support Oregon's students.

The Oregon Education Association strongly supports SB 916, which would provide limited unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to workers on strike. OEA bargains 239 contracts across the state, typically with each contract spanning two to three years. Over the last 20 years, OEA has negotiated approximately 1,750 contracts. Since 2000, there have been only eight strikes, demonstrating just how rare strikes are in education—less than 0.5% of all negotiations result in a strike.

If SB 916 had been in place, those eight strikes since 2000 would have resulted in just nine weeks of unemployment insurance eligibility statewide. To put this into perspective, this equates to less than one week of eligibility every two years—a negligible impact. Furthermore, because school districts budget for educator salaries as part of their annual financial planning, the provision of UI benefits during a strike would not represent an additional financial burden unless substitute workers were hired to replace striking staff.

Importantly, the A-Engrossed version of SB 916 addresses concerns that had been raised about potential "double payment" risks for school districts. Specifically, Sections 6 and 7 of the bill ensure that if a worker receives both unemployment benefits and backpay or pay for makeup days covering the same period, the Employment Department can recover the benefits properly. This prevents individuals from being compensated twice for the same time period and protects school districts from bearing any unintended financial burden.

Educators do not frequently strike. But when they do, it is only after all other avenues to address critical challenges in schools have been exhausted. These challenges often include overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and insufficient supports for students. Educators strike to advocate for better learning conditions for students. Striking educators not only fight for their students' futures but also risk their own financial stability to ensure classrooms are safe, equitable, and supportive learning environments.

While educators are a part of this conversation, workers across all industries face similar challenges. Whether they are in education, healthcare, manufacturing, or public services, workers strike to advocate for fair wages, better working conditions, and essential resources.



This bill would provide a modest, temporary safety net for all workers who, like educators, sacrifice their pay to improve the systems they work within.

SB 916 acknowledges the reality that striking is a last resort for workers, not a first choice. It ensures that those who fight for improvements in their workplaces are not left financially vulnerable while doing so. This bill does not normalize strikes—it simply reflects that Oregon values the contributions of its workers and the vital role they play in shaping the state’s future.

We urge your support for SB 916. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Oregon’s educators, students, and communities.