



International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, Transportation Workers

LOCAL UNION NO. 16

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February 6, 2025

TO:

Chair Taylor
Vice-Chair Bonham
Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business

FROM:

Russ Benton
Regional Representative/Political Coordinator
SMART Local 16

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 916 – Unemployment Insurance for Striking Workers

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today to express our strong support for **Senate Bill 916**, which would allow unemployment benefits for workers who are on strike. This bill is a critical step toward ensuring that workers who engage in lawful work stoppages aren't left without the means to support themselves and their families.

Let me be clear, workers only make the difficult choice to go on strike as an absolute last resort. If you ask a striking worker whether they'd rather be standing on a picket line or doing the job that supports their family, the answer will always be supporting their family by doing their job. Strikes are difficult and are always a last resort after prolonged and often frustrating negotiations.

Calling a strike a "voluntary choice" oversimplifies a serious decision. It ignores the courage it takes to stand up for fair wages, and safe working conditions. Union members are professionals who take pride in their work. When they strike, it's because their employer has left them with no viable alternative.

We see this dynamic play out far too often. CEO's are earning hundreds of times more than the average employee while their companies are reporting record profits and they still refuse to invest in wages, benefits, or retirement security, while working families are told there simply isn't enough money to go around. This isn't only unfair, it's unsustainable.

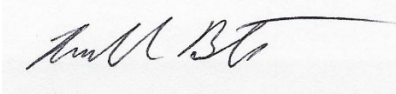
SB 916 is a modest but meaningful way to restore some balance. It would allow workers on strike to access unemployment insurance, something they have paid into, while fighting for basic fairness, without financially devastating their family.

This policy reflects Oregon's values: equity, dignity, and respect for working people. It demonstrates that we believe in supporting those who build, care for, teach, and serve our communities.

By passing SB 916, Oregon can lead the West Coast in putting workers first and ensuring that no one is forced to choose between standing up for their rights and feeding their family.

Thank you for your time and consideration. On behalf of SMART Local 16, and the many workers we represent, I respectfully and strongly urge you to support SB 916.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Russ Benton", written over a light gray rectangular background.

Russ Benton
Regional Representative/ Political Coordinator
Sheet Metal Workers
SMART Local 16
NWRC,