

TO: Chair Grayber
Vice-Chairs Munoz and Elmer
Members of the House Labor and Workplace Standards committee,
FR: Brandon Bryant, IAM
RE: Testimony in Support of SB 916, UI for striking workers

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Elmer and Munoz and members of the committee,

My name is Brandon Bryant, President DBR of District W24 of the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers (IAM). I represent over 5,100 workers in our District, of which almost 3,000 work in Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 916 to remove the exclusion of striking workers being eligible for unemployment insurance.

In the last several years, my IAM members have gone through negotiations that necessitated their action to go on strike. Going on strike is never the goal within the IAM and for our members. It is a tool we must use, at times, to further negotiations to an acceptable, agreeable completion. Corporations never, if rarely, just willingly give employees their best offer, workers have to fight them for every penny that they deserve. There is a power imbalance in our economy, where businesses hold all the cards, and workers are left to scrape and claw back just enough for them to survive. This power imbalance shows up even more so during a strike, where corporations can outlast or starve out workers to make them settle for less. This bill helps to level that imbalance.

This happened in 2022 when our over 600 members that work for Weyerhaeuser had to go on strike to prevent wage loss due to higher healthcare costs. Healthcare was a big issue during those negotiations, and the wage increases the company offered would have been mostly eaten up by the uncapped and rising employee share of healthcare costs. Our members were not willing to "take less" to continue to work their same jobs, jobs that they have held for decades, and were forced to use the tool of a strike to get negotiations back on track toward a fair deal. After the IAM went on strike against Weyerhaeuser, negotiations stalled. It would be a week or two before the employer would respond to our requests to return to the negotiation table. The employer decided to use the wait and starve them out tactic.

Most recently, we had almost 1200 IAM members go on strike against the Boeing Company, here in Oregon. This negotiation centered around stagnated wages and retirement security. Our members were stuck in a long term, 10 year, contract that only provided for 1% wage increases, every other year, for its last 8 years. That is a 4% general wage increase over almost a decade, and at a time where the US saw historic inflation and cost of living increases. The time to correct that, along with securing a better retirement future, was our negotiation in 2024, Negotiations did not result in correcting those losses at the end of bargaining, and our members had to take the step withhold their labor, to push one of the largest corporations in the world, to propose an

acceptable offer. That offer came after 53 days of striking and unnecessary pain inflicted on our members and the community.

The safety net of Unemployment Insurance is a valuable resource for workers in Oregon. It provides partial wage replacement to offset the loss of wages, when a worker loses their job. This resource helps to cover the costs of the basic necessities of life; food, shelter, healthcare, prescriptions, and child care. Workers that must go on strike, for better wages, working conditions, healthcare, safety, and more, deserve this same resource. They shouldn't be punished because they are taking a stand with their coworkers for better workplace benefits. They shouldn't have to suffer more than other workers, just because they took a stand for fairness and respect for themselves and workers that come after them at their employer. The small, partial wage replacement of Unemployment Insurance, would help cover the necessities of life for a striking worker and lessen the burden on their communities.

If and when SB 916 passes, it will allow workers to continue to fairly and in good faith negotiate with their employer at the bargaining table. I feel that it would make strikes less frequent, because it would take the unjust "starve them out" tactic out of employers' playbook. Employers would be more apt to negotiate to a truer best and final offer, that would more likely be accepted. Necessary strikes also would likely be shorter. Knowing that their workers have taken the serious step to reject an offer from the company and having additional resources from Unemployment Insurance, would strongly encourage the employer to return to the table sooner, to resolve their differences.

I truly appreciate your time and efforts on this important Bill and encourage you to support and vote for SB 916. Together we can make Oregon a great place to work for all workers, including our Union Workers.

Sincerely,

Brandon Bryant

President Directing Business Representative

District W24 – IAMAW

253-370-4024

brandon@iamw24.org