

Submitter: Joe Baessler
On Behalf Of: OR AFSCME
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB916

Testimony in favor of SB 916

From: Joe Baessler, Executive Director, Oregon AFSCME

Chair Grayber members of the committee,

Oregon AFSCME represents more than 39,000 workers in every corner of the state. Our membership works for the public good of our state and collectively our union fights for economic and social justice for our members, their families, and all Oregon workers.

One of the most fundamental rights of union represented workers is to strike for better wages, benefits and working conditions when management refuses to bargain in good faith. When our hard-working members vote to strike, they do not take it lightly. It is an action of last resort and requires personal sacrifice for themselves and their families. Employers can cut wages, health care and other benefits and have the economic advantage. We strongly support SB 916 because it will level the playing field and, we believe, reduce the length of strikes by creating a more balanced collective bargaining process.

As service demands have increased while staffing levels have decreased, workloads and wages have gotten less fair. Workers are under increasing pressure and at higher risk. And the fact is that public-sector workers are already held to a higher standard when it comes to bargaining: in the most extreme situation, under the Oregon Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act, public sector workers and employers would engage in a minimum of 150 days bargaining and then if there is no agreement, a minimum of 15 days of mediation and then if still at impasse, there would need to be a 30 day cooling off period and a 10 day strike notice before a union could even go on strike. That's at least 210 days of process before a strike.

The fact is, when employers have less economic advantage, they will be more likely to be reasonable and stay at the bargaining table. Even though 86% of strikes settle prior to 2 weeks, should strikes go longer, SB 916 would be a lifeline. While unemployment insurance won't make up for all lost wages, it can help put food on the table, keep kids in child care, pay for urgent prescription medication, and help people stay afloat and level the playing field so employers have less ability to starve out workers and drag on negotiations.

As you've heard, SB 916 is cost-neutral to employer and with the additional amendments, employers would not pay salary backpay in addition to UI benefits –I urge you to quickly pass SB 916 to increase fairness in collective bargaining and protect our members from extraordinary financial hardship when they exercise their legal right to strike.

Respectfully Submitted;
Joe Baessler, Executive Director Oregon AFSCME