



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Press Contact:

Elizabeth Cronen, elizabeth.cronen@oregonlegislature.gov

Senate Passes Bill to Help Level the Playing Field for Workers

Senate Bill 916 allows the same unemployment benefits whether workers are laid off or pushed into a strike by low pay and unfair conditions

SALEM, OR – The Oregon Senate voted today to permit unemployment benefits for workers while they are on strike.

“We cannot expect Oregonians working in unsafe conditions for inadequate pay to do nothing,” said **Senator Kathleen Taylor (D – SE Portland)**, chair of Committee on Labor and Business. “We have to ensure they can keep food on the table while they fight for change.”

A nonpartisan estimate of the bill’s potential effect predicted that overall unemployment tax rates would not increase even a full 1 percent under the legislation. Employers that have layoffs or strikes could pay more after their workers claim unemployment benefits, but small businesses will be largely unaffected by the changes in the bill. Their workers rarely are unionized and therefore don’t go on strike.

Under the measure, striking workers won’t qualify for benefits until after a two-week wait. In the rare case that a worker gets backpay when the strikes ends, they will have to repay any unemployment benefits they collected. The average weekly unemployment benefit in Oregon is about \$500 per week.

“Employers have the upper hand over workers when it comes to pay, scheduling, and job conditions,” said **Senator James I. Manning, Jr. (D - Eugene, Veneta, Elmira)**, a co-chief sponsor of the bill. “The right to strike, negotiate, and collectively bargain is the most powerful instrument the workforce has for offsetting this imbalance; Senate Bill 916 levels the playing field and helps maintain that right.”

Today’s vote passing the bill was 16 to 12 in the Senate. The measure now goes to the Oregon House of Representatives for consideration.

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