



UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FOR STRIKERS

Rather than negotiate a fair contract, employers can weaponize the economic instability of workers – especially low-income workers – to force a strike and “starve them out.” Striking workers and their families should have access to some economic support.

THE PROBLEM



Employers can refuse to negotiate fair contracts with workers, force strikes, and use families' financial distress as a bargaining strategy. Because striking workers lack access to unemployment insurance assistance, employers can use the threat of evictions, repossessions, and other economic hardships to suppress wages and working conditions.

THE SOLUTION



By approving SB 5777 / HB 1893, Washington can join New York, New Jersey and Maine in allowing workers to access unemployment insurance after more than two weeks on strike. This will help level the playing field, discourage economic hardship as a bargaining strategy, and promote good-faith contract negotiations.



Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Why the Legislature should approve SB 5777 / HB 1893:

- **Workers join together in unions to negotiate for family-supporting wages,** safer working conditions, and respect on the job. But some employers refuse to reach contract agreements. Instead, they choose to “starve workers out” by locking them out or forcing a strike. Locked-out workers have access to unemployment insurance benefits in Washington, but striking workers do not.
- **Employers’ refusal to negotiate is a feature of their bargaining strategy, not a bug.** In the recent strike by entertainment industry writers, a studio executive made their strategy clear: “Allow things to drag on until union members start losing their apartments and losing their houses.”¹ It is reprehensible that employers build their bargaining strategy around the evictions of employees’ families.
- **Particularly for low-income workers, the hardship of missing paychecks — with no economic support — prevents them from improving their wages.** The employers of low-wage workers should not be allowed to weaponize the workers’ economic instability when they join together to improve their working conditions.

Unemployment insurance sustains communities



When workers on strike can make their rent payments and afford groceries for their families, that not only provides a critical safety net to their families, it benefits small businesses and entire communities.

Economists estimate that every \$1 spent on unemployment benefits generates \$2 worth of economic activity.²

This creates a “multiplier effect” that means vital assistance for depressed local economies. This helps sustain stores, restaurants, childcare facilities, and other businesses during labor disputes. It preserves jobs and generates local revenue.

Corporations shouldn’t be able to starve out striking workers to avoid paying them what they’re worth.

- **To level the playing field, the Legislature should allow striking workers to collect unemployment insurance.** SB 5777 / HB 1893, sponsored by Sen. Karen Keiser and Rep. Beth Doglio, would end the exclusion of striking workers from unemployment insurance after two weeks on strike. New York has always allowed striking workers this option, and New Jersey and Maine

have now joined them in doing so.

- **It’s cruel to allow workers exercising their right to strike to go hungry, bankrupt, or lose their homes** because they are temporarily out of work. And it’s cynical to believe that allowing workers to access unemployment benefits will encourage them to go on strike. Workers do not decide to go on strike lightly. When they do, unemployment insurance will simply help their families survive. Only a fair contract can help them thrive.

1. Hollywood Studios’ WGA Strike Endgame Is To Let Writers Go Broke Before Resuming Talks In Fall (7-11-23) 2. Economic Policy Institute (6-26-20)



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In addition to Investing in UI for Strikers, the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO is supporting a range of issues that address economic opportunity and justice. Learn more at www.wslc.org or www.TheStand.org.

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