

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FOR STRIKING WORKERS (SB 5041)

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We are living through a time of historic inequality. Working people are squeezed by increasing rent and cost of groceries, and in response, they are forming unions and demanding more. But the playing field is not level.

THE PROBLEM

Employers can refuse to recognize the union or bargain a fair contract, instead using workers' economic instability as leverage to force a strike.

Strikes are a last resort, and employers are always able to weather a work stoppage better than a worker. When more than 30% of Americans have less than \$400 in savings, the threat of eviction, repossession, or loss of health care and prescription coverage is very real, especially for low income workers, who are disproportionately women and people of color.

THE SOLUTION

Allow striking workers to access unemployment benefits.

By approving SB 5041, Washington can join New York, New Jersey and Maine in allowing workers who strike to access unemployment insurance (UI).

SB 5041 will help level the playing field, discourage economic hardship as a bargaining strategy, and promote good-faith contract negotiations -- all while empowering low wage workers to organize their union and bargain a first contract.



- **Employers' willful violations of labor law are a feature of their bargaining strategy, not a bug.** For example, the union representing Starbucks workers has filed more than 500 unfair labor practice charges with the NLRB; as of January 2025, Starbucks has lost 27 of 29 cases decided by the Board. Yet even with NLRB action, workers have been forced to strike to secure their first contract. The incoming administration is likely to hamstring the NLRB, making unemployment for striking workers all the more essential.
- **Washington's unemployment trust fund is in good shape.** We have carefully stewarded our trust fund and, unlike other states, did not take out a loan for unemployment insurance during the pandemic.
- **Long strikes are rare.** Data from Cornell's Labor Action Tracker shows only 11 strikes in the last four years which could qualify under this bill. Strikes are a last resort, and no one goes on strike lightly. Strikes can also impact earned retirement benefits, health insurance, and prescription drug coverage.
- **Workers do not go on strike lightly. And while an important safety net, UI does not fully replace lost wages.** When workers strike, unemployment insurance will simply help their families survive. Only a fair contract can help them thrive.