



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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SB 871 - Unemployment Insurance - Disqualification - Stoppage of Work

Caused by Labor Dispute

Senate Finance Committee

March 5, 2024

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards

President

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 871. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

SB 871 amends the unemployment insurance benefits disqualification for labor disputes and work stoppages to remove disqualifications for strikes lasting longer than 14 days. This change permits workers to collect unemployment insurance after the 14th day of a strike. When companies fail to bargain in good faith, workers can be forced to take action and walk off the job. Strikes are the final resort but an important right of workers, protected by the National Labor Relations Act.

New York and New Jersey already permit workers on strike to collect unemployment benefits. Similar bills to SB 871 are being considered in Washington, Pennsylvania, California, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. At the federal level, Representative Adam Schiff (D-CA) introduced the Empowering Striking Workers Act of 2023, which had 36 co-sponsors and the support of over 20 international unions. It also made workers eligible for unemployment insurance after 14 days on strike. AFL-CIO National President Liz Shuler, commended the proposal, stating, "When corporations attempt to starve workers during a strike or lockout lasting longer than fourteen days, workers should qualify for much-needed assistance that will keep food on the table and a roof over their heads as they fight for a fair deal on the job." James T. Callahan, General President of the International Union of Operating Engineers, added, "The problem with current law is that it assumes workers choose to go out on strike. Let's be clear. Workers don't want to withhold their labor; employers force workers into exercising their right to strike. Denying workers the unemployment insurance they have earned turns the logic of the whole program on its head. It also puts a government thumb on the scale in favor of employers. If the right to strike is, in fact, a basic, fundamental right, we should not deny workers a benefit they've earned to starve them into submission."

Workers already make tremendous sacrifices when going on strike, providing unemployment insurance could prevent them from losing their homes while fighting for fair contracts. We urge a favorable report on SB 871.