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Unemployment insurance for striking workers

A low-cost policy that's good for workers and state economies

Report • By Daniel Perez • February 3, 2025

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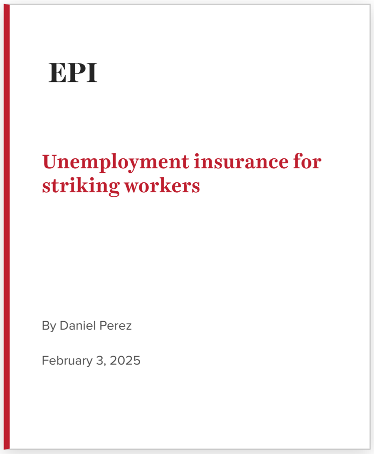
Summary: Lawmakers across the country are increasingly recognizing that making striking workers eligible for unemployment insurance (UI) is good for workers and good economics.



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Key findings

- Striking workers in most states are disqualified from receiving UI, which opens the door for employers to undermine union negotiations by engaging in bad faith tactics.
- Only two states —New Jersey and New York—currently extend UI to striking workers. Lawmakers in 13 additional states have previously introduced or are actively considering such policies.
- EPI estimates that the cost of extending employment insurance to strikers would represent between 0.04% to 0.96% of a given state's total UI expenditures—an almost negligible share.
- These policies don't only impact striking workers; they also help stabilize the economy by keeping dollars flowing to communities where a strike is taking place.
- While opponents have raised concerns that such policies will encourage more strikes, providing UI protections to striking workers may actually lead to fewer strikes.

Why this matters

The need for states to take decisive steps to protect their workers' rights is particularly urgent in the face of the incoming administration and corporations' brazen attacks on labor rights.

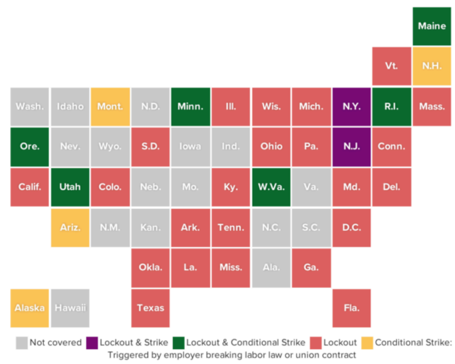
How to fix it

Lawmakers should take a practical, impactful, low-cost step toward protecting workers' collective bargaining rights by making striking workers eligible to receive unemployment insurance.

Charting the problem

There is precedent for ensuring workers can access unemployment insurance when negotiations break down

Unemployment insurance coverage during labor disputes by state, 2023



Source: National Employment Law Project (NELP) analysis of U.S. Department of Labor, Comparison of State UI Laws (2023). Adapted from Figure 1 of *Unemployment Insurance for Striking Workers* (NELP 2024).

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Unions and collective bargaining have long been critical institutions for growing the middle class, improving job quality, and creating a more equitable economy (EPI 2021; Bivens et al. 2023). One of the most powerful tools that unionized workers have for improving their working conditions is exercising their right to strike. Yet strikes are incredibly risky and almost always pursued only as a last resort by workers seeking fair outcomes in difficult contract negotiations.

In most states, striking workers are disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance (UI), enabling employers to undermine the collective bargaining process. But lawmakers are increasingly recognizing that expanding UI protections to striking workers can help sustain workers when they have no choice but to strike. Not only do such protections allow workers to share in broad-based economic growth, but they also help stabilize the economy.

There is particular urgency right now for state policymakers to safeguard the rights of workers to join a union and collectively bargain. In November, SpaceX and Amazon filed a lawsuit to contest the constitutionality of the National Labor Relation Board (NLRB), the federal agency responsible for protecting the workers' right to organize (Hsu 2024). Given these brazen attacks on labor rights and the current federal administration, extending UI protections to striking workers is one cost-effective and decisive step states can take to help safeguard workers' rights and encourage fair negotiations in the collective bargaining process.

If enacted, this policy would:

- Cost states less than of 1% of total UI expenditures;
- Protect workers, while discouraging employers from engaging in bad faith negotiation tactics;
- Allow workers to advocate for safer, better workplaces—improving job quality standards within firms, across industries, and in local economies, for both union and nonunion workers; and
- Help maintain workers' right to organize and collectively bargain amid ongoing legal and political attacks on labor standards.

SECTIONS

Unemployment insurance for striking workers is good economics

The U.S. unemployment insurance system was established following the Great Depression, amid a period of widespread joblessness. It is intended to offer a financial lifeline to jobless workers, supporting them through times of economic turmoil or until they find work that provides adequate pay and aligns with their skills and circumstances (Evermore 2023; Farooq et al. 2020).

UI is also a critical support for macroeconomic health. UI dollars help keep local economies running during periods of widespread unemployment and economic turmoil. And by allowing workers to find the jobs best suited for their skills, it helps maximize the long-run productivity of the workforce.

Making striking workers eligible for UI is both good economics and consistent with the program's mandate. It would mitigate some of the immediate economic risk to workers and their families; keep dollars flowing to communities where a strike is taking place; ensure striking workers can negotiate a fair contract with their employer; and allow striking workers to resume jobs for which they are already trained. Forcing workers to find another job because their current employer is unwilling to negotiate a fair contract may require those workers to be retrained and force their former employer to find and train a new workforce— both of which are a drag on productivity and economic output.

UI benefits for striking workers is good policy with precedent

There's strong precedent for ensuring workers can access UI when negotiations break down. **Figure A**, an audit of state UI laws conducted by the National Employment Law Project highlights the variation in state UI laws related to labor disputes (NELP 2024).

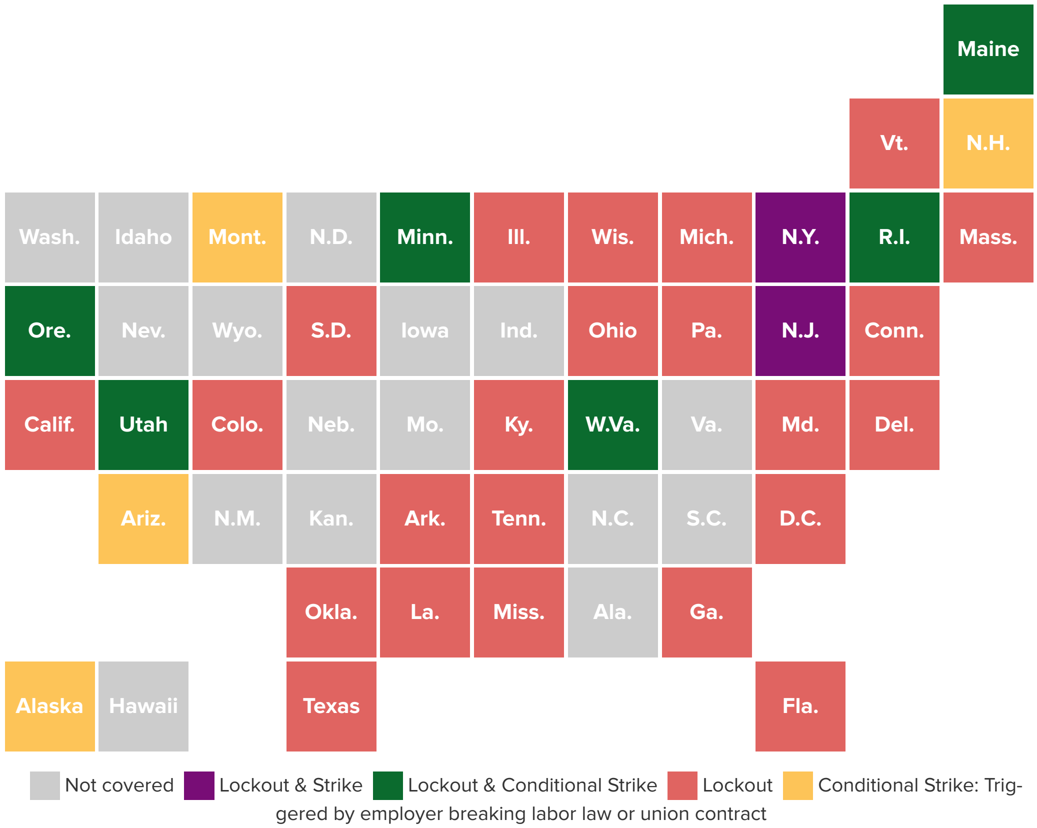
Policymakers seeking to promote a balanced collective bargaining process—where workers' right to strike is a true counterbalance to employers' right to lock people out—should design UI for striking worker bills that cover both situations: where an employer locks out workers and when workers go on strike. Only two states—New York and New Jersey—currently provide UI eligibility to workers under both scenarios.

Table 1 highlights 13 additional states that previously introduced or are actively considering extending UI to striking workers. Legislators in two states, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, introduced bills with 30-day waiting periods. Five states—California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, and Maryland considered bills with 14-day waiting periods. Four others—Hawaii, Ohio, Oregon, and Rhode Island—introduced bills with seven-day waiting periods. Minnesota and Washington legislators introduced bills with waiting periods ranging from seven to 14 days depending on the strike's start date.

Figure A

There is precedent for ensuring workers can access unemployment insurance when negotiations break down

Unemployment insurance coverage during labor disputes by state, 2023



Source: National Employment Law Project (NELP) analysis of U.S. Department of Labor, Comparison of State UI Laws (2023). Adapted from Figure 1 of *Unemployment Insurance for Striking Workers* (NELP 2024).

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Lawmakers in New York and New Jersey— the only two states that currently provide UI eligibility to strikers—have also proposed reducing additional waiting periods. In 2020, New York shortened its waiting period from seven weeks to 14 days. In 2024 lawmakers proposed further reducing the waiting period of strikers (from 14 days to seven days) to align it with that of other workers but the bill failed. On April 24, 2024, New Jersey successfully reduced its waiting period from 30 days to 14 days and retroactively applied the change to all UI claims filed on or after January 1, 2022.

This year, legislators in Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Oregon, Washington, and potentially more states are expected to consider legislation to extend UI to striking workers.

Table 1

A growing number of states are proposing legislation to extend unemployment insurance to striking workers

State legislation making striking workers eligible for unemployment insurance, 2018–2025

State	Bill number	Legislative session	Bill details	Status
California	SB799	2023–2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 14 days	Vetoed
Connecticut	HB 5146	2023–2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 14 days	Vetoed
	SB 8	2024–2025	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 14 days	Introduced
Delaware	SB 26	2025–2026	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 14 days	Introduced
Hawaii	SB 158	2025–2026	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 7 days	Introduced
	SB 2188	2024–2025	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 7 days	Did not pass
Illinois	HB 4143	2023–2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 14 days	Did not pass
Maryland	SB 0871 / HB 0339	2024–2025	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 14 days	Did not pass
Massachusetts	S1172	2023-2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 30 days	Did not pass
	SD2039 / HD.1367	2025-2026	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 30 days	Introduced
Minnesota	HF 3446	2023–2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike beginning the Sunday after the first day of the strike (eligibility ranges from 7 to 14 days depending on the strike's start date)	Did not pass
New Jersey	A3861	2018–2019	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 30 days	Enacted
	A4772	2022–2023	Reduced waiting period from 30 days to 14 days	Enacted
New York	S 4573	2019–2020	Reduce waiting period from 7 weeks to 14 days	Enacted

Table 1 (cont.)

State	Bill number	Legislative session	Bill details	Status
	A 1443	2023–2024	Reduce waiting period from 14 days to 7 days	Did not pass
Ohio	SB 180	2023–2024	Allows striking workers to apply for up to 4 weeks of retroactive UI benefits	Did not pass
	HB 334	2023–2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 7 days	Did not pass
Oregon	SB 916	2025	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 7 days	Introduced
Pennsylvania	HB 1481	2023–2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 30 days	Did not pass
Rhode Island	SB 2783	2023–2024	Provides UI access to workers on strike for more than 7 days	Did not pass
Washington	SB 5041	2025–2026	Provides UI access to workers on strike beginning the Sunday after the first day of the strike (eligibility ranges from 7 to 14 days depending on the strike's start date)	Introduced

Source: Analysis of state legislation.

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UI for striking workers would provide meaningful benefits with little to no impact on state UI systems

Critics have raised concerns about the cost of this type of legislation and how it could impact state UI trust funds. These concerns merit serious consideration, as UI programs are a vital component of the social safety net and funds must remain solvent and accessible to workers in times of need.

Analysis of publicly available strike and UI data show that UI for striking workers would have little to no impact on state UI systems. **Table 2** details cost estimates in select states that have (or are considering) such legislation. Across the board, the cost of extending UI to strikers would represent between 0.04% to 0.96% of a given state's total UI expenditures—an almost negligible share.

Table 2

Estimated benefits for strikers would account for less than 1% of total statewide UI expenditures, in states that have considered UI for strikers legislation

Estimated UI benefits for strikers vs. state UI expenditures, 2021–2024

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
state	**Waiting period**	**Qualifying strikes**	**Eligible strikers**	**State UI recipiency rate, 2023**	**Strikers who apply for benefits**	**UI avg weekly benefit amount**	**Avg duration of qualifying strikes (weeks)**	**Estimated benefits paid to strikers, 2021–2024**	**State UI expenditures, 2021–2024**	**Striker share of state UI benefits**
California	14 days	31	238,663	42.6%	101,688	$332.89	7.3	$245,692,579	$25,674,516,414	0.96%
Connecticut	14 days	2	1,750	37.3%	653	$397.18	3.5	$907,751	$2,344,478,976	0.04%
Delaware	14 days	0	0	20.2%	0	$312.30	0.0	$0	$261,137,971	0.0%
Hawaii	7 days	6	3,282	38.2%	1,252	$521.45	7.1	$4,616,610	$819,051,764	0.56%
Illinois	14 days	22	10,368	31.2%	3,237	$430.12	5.2	$7,223,675	$8,661,100,873	0.08%
Maryland	14 days	4	539	29.6%	160	$347.28	12.6	$700,518	$1,576,198,443	0.04%
Massachusetts	30 days	6	5,665	60.7%	3,439	$597.75	16.9	$34,799,391	$7,615,414,867	0.46%
Minnesota	7 days	10	7,881	49.5%	3,900	$491.23	3.6	$6,951,615	$4,455,748,870	0.16%
New Jersey	7 days	5	2,645	49.3%	1,303	$518.09	7.5	$5,053,371	$9,104,297,783	0.06%
New York	7 days	26	65,177	40.0%	26,065	$360.82	5.9	$55,447,375	$12,336,393,670	0.45%
Ohio	7 days	12	7,569	21.1%	1,598	$422.90	5.8	$3,917,993	$3,287,773,793	0.12%
Oregon	7 days	17	6,843	38.7%	2,646	$476.45	5.0	$6,261,019	$2,601,122,300	0.24%
Pennsylvania	30 days	5	3,988	35.3%	1,409	$406.19	8.0	$4,594,920	$7,270,708,323	0.06%
Rhode Island	7 days	2	132	53.5%	71	$413.20	16.1	$471,493	$739,155,170	0.06%
Washington	7 days	11	11,969	32.1%	3,846	$574.08	7.4	$16,315,642	$5,504,827,505	0.30%

Table 2 (cont.)

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
state	Waiting period	Qualifying strikes	Eligible strikers	State UI recipiency rate, 2023	Strikers who apply for benefits	UI avg weekly benefit amount	Avg duration of qualifying strikes (weeks)	Estimated benefits paid to strikers, 2021–2024	State UI expenditures, 2021–2024	Striker share of state UI benefits
					= c × d			= e × f × g		= h ÷ i

Notes: Labor Action Tracker data cover strikes that occurred between January 2021 and November 2024. Unemployment Insurance recipiency rates are based on data from 2023. State UI expenditure data span January 2021 through November 2024. Average weekly benefit amount is calculated by dividing benefits paid by weeks compensated.

Source: EPI analysis of strike data from Cornell University ILR School & University of Illinois LER School's Labor Action Tracker, January 2021–November 2024, unemployment insurance recipiency rates and monthly program data from the U.S. Department of Labor, and industry employment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, March 2023.

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Even under generous assumptions, the cost of this policy remains minimal. For instance, existing research suggests that union members are generally more informed about their UI eligibility, and thus more likely to successfully file a claim (Forsythe and Yang 2022). Considering a scenario where eligible strikers have a recipiency rate that is 20 percentage points higher than the state average, the estimated cost of extending UI to strikers rises to between 0.06% and 1.4% of overall UI expenditures. Further, under a highly unlikely scenario where 100% of eligible strikers apply for and receive UI benefits, the cost range increases to between 0.1%–2.2% (see **Appendix Table 1**).

Since strike activity can vary from year to year, combining 47 months of data provides a larger sample size for creating a comprehensive cost estimate. **Table 3** presents annualized estimates to illustrate the potential year-to-year fiscal impact in each state.

Table 3

Annualized unemployment insurance for striking workers cost estimates

State	Annualized UI benefits to strikers	Annualized state UI expenditures	Striker share of benefits paid per year
California	$62,730,020	$6,555,195,680	0.96%
Connecticut	$231,766	$598,590,377	0.04%
Delaware	$0	$66,673,525	0.00%
Hawaii	$1,178,709	$209,119,599	0.56%
Illinois	$1,844,343	$2,211,344,904	0.08%
Maryland	$178,856	$402,433,645	0.04%
Massachusetts	$8,884,951	$1,944,361,243	0.46%
Minnesota	$1,774,881	$1,137,638,009	0.16%
New Jersey	$1,290,222	$2,324,501,562	0.06%
New York	$14,156,776	$3,149,717,533	0.45%
Ohio	$1,000,339	$839,431,607	0.12%
Oregon	$1,598,558	$664,116,332	0.24%
Pennsylvania	$1,173,171	$1,856,351,061	0.06%
Rhode Island	$120,381	$188,720,469	0.06%
Washington	$4,165,696	$1,405,487,874	0.30%

Notes: Annualized figures are based on 47 months of strike and UI data spanning January 2021–November 2024.

Source: EPI analysis of strike data from Cornell University ILR School & University of Illinois LER School's Labor Action Tracker, January 2021–November 2024, UI program data from the U.S. Department of Labor, and industry employment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, March 2023.

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There is no reason to delay UI benefits to striking workers

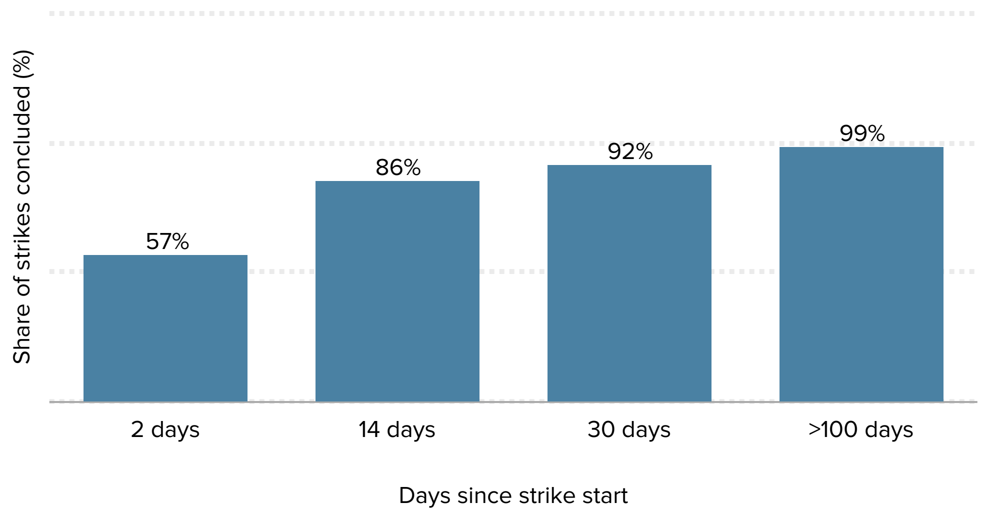
In establishing or strengthening striking worker eligibility for UI, lawmakers should not impose additional waiting periods for workers to claim benefits. There is already a weeks-long lag between the moment a claimant applies for UI and when they receive benefits—a delay that many workers cannot afford. Workers who use their collective voice to advocate for better working standards should not face penalties or delays relative to other workers.

Figure B shows that most strikes are short-lived: 86% end within 14 days and 92% end within 30 days, according to data from Cornell University ILR School & University of Illinois LER School's Labor Action Tracker. These durations often fall within or just before the

Figure B

Nearly all labor strikes are over in 14 days or less

Duration of U.S. labor strikes, January 2022–November 2023



Source: Author's analysis of strike data from the Cornell University ILR School & University of Illinois LER School's Labor Action Tracker, January 2022–November 2023.

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eligibility waiting periods specified in many proposed state bills, effectively disqualifying striking workers from benefits when they most need them.

Table 4 breaks out strike durations by decile and state. Apart from Ohio, the median strike duration across the select states over the 47 months in our analysis was just 1–5 days. This indicates that states with the longest waiting periods would effectively provide no support to workers during this time of potential hardship.

While fewer workers accessing UI means smaller costs to state and employer UI funds, this comes at a steep price for workers and their families. For some, these delays could mean the difference between affording rent or putting food on the table at the end of the month.

Table 4

Long waiting periods could deny workers benefits when they need them most

Average strike duration by decile and proposed waiting periods in select states, 2021–2024

Strike duration deciles	California	Connecticut	Hawaii	Illinois	Maryland	Massachusetts	Minnesota	New Jersey	New York	Ohio	Oregon	Pennsylvania	Rhode Island	Washington
10th	1	1	1.2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
20th	1	2	3	1	1.8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
30th	1	2	3	2	2.2	1	1	1	1	4.8	2	1	1	1
40th	1	2	3	2	3	1	2	1	1	8	3	1	1.8	1
Median	2	3	5	5	3	3	2	1	1	14	5	3	3	2
60th	3	3	7	8	6	4	3	3	2	23.4	8	3	3	3
70th	3	3.5	11.9	12.8	11.4	7	5	3	3	29.5	14	5	5.6	7
80th	5	5	34.8	22	24.6	16.4	10.2	31	7	36.8	21	8.4	13.4	9.6
90th	16	15	51.7	32.8	65.4	35.1	25	31	15.5	44.8	48	24.2	93.2	18.3
Proposed eligibility waiting period	14 days	14 days	7 days	14 days	14 days	30 days	7 days	7 days	7 days	14 days	7 days	30 days	7 days	14 days
Strikes in sample	(n=271)	(n=16)	(n=12)	(n=78)	(n=15)	(n=54)	(n=37)	(n=21)	(n=126)	(n=24)	(n=41)	(n=55)	(n=7)	(n=78)

Source: EPI Analysis of strike data from the Cornell University ILR School & University of Illinois LER School's Labor Action Tracker, January 2021–November 2024.

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Extending UI to striking workers would encourage fair negotiations and could lead to fewer protracted strikes

Opponents of this policy have raised the concern that workers would be more inclined to strike if they had access to unemployment insurance. While a 2020 survey found that workers with high confidence in their ability to access UI felt more empowered to join or form unions and were less fearful to engage in collective action to address health and safety concerns, strikes are just one form of collective action and they are often only pursued as a measure of last resort (Hertel-Fernandez and Gould-Werth 2020). The fear that workers would willingly risk their pay, benefits, and even jobs for UI benefits is unfounded. Moreover, research shows there is no state in which UI benefits are sufficient to cover a worker's basic necessities—which speaks to the need for long-overdue reforms to the UI system (Bivens et al. 2021).

On the contrary, providing UI protections to striking workers might lead to fewer strikes. Employers would be obliged to engage workers more earnestly at the bargaining table, knowing that they can't rely on threats to starve workers out by forcing a strike. This would discourage scenarios where employers use their larger economic resources to outlast workers while either refusing to bargain in good faith or presenting a "final offer" they know workers are likely to reject, a strategy that currently undermines the effectiveness of collective bargaining (Murphy 2023).

Evidence from New Jersey further casts doubt on claims that UI for striking workers would encourage more strikes. On April 21, 2023, New Jersey reduced the eligibility waiting period for strikers from 30 days to 14. An analysis by North Star Policy Action found no significant increase in labor activity compared with other states with similar levels of union density and membership.[1]

What do unions do? And why should states support them?

A fair collective bargaining framework is an investment in workers and businesses. In 1984, economists Richard Freeman and James Medoff famously asked, "What do unions do?" Their seminal book revealed that labor unions make workplaces more productive, while promoting a more equal distribution of income. Contemporary research has further emphasized the important role of unions in creating good jobs and ensuring working-class prosperity.

In purely economic terms, union workers earn higher wages—on average, 11.1% more than their nonunion peers—and enjoy better benefits (EPI 2025; Shierholz et al. 2024). For example, 95% of union workers have access to employer-sponsored health benefits, compared with 71% of nonunion workers (BLS-NCS 2024a). Further, 91% of union workers have paid sick leave versus 79% of nonunion workers and 95% have access to employer sponsored retirement benefits compared with 72% of nonunion workers (BLS-NCS 2024b; BLS-NCS 2024c).

Union contracts promote equity by establishing transparent and fair pay structures, conferring significant benefits to workers from all backgrounds and walks of life: Black union workers earn 14.3% more than their nonunion peers; Latino workers earn 15.9% more; and the average pay boost for a worker without a high school diploma is a remarkable 22.4% (EPI 2025).

The benefits of union contracts extend beyond just union members and workplaces. Research shows that unions set wage and benefit standards that spill over to nonunion workers, lifting wages and improving conditions across entire industries and local economies (Mishel 2021).

Further, in an era marked by heightened political tensions, unions can bring together workers from different backgrounds around the common cause of improving working conditions. Research shows that unions promote cross-racial solidarity, reducing racial resentment between members (Frymer and Grumbach 2021). For state lawmakers, supporting labor standards, unions, and collective bargaining, is an investment in economic, political, and social wellbeing.

Conclusion

Strikes are one of the few effective tools workers have to counter the unequal distribution of power in the labor market (EPI n.d.). Workers do not make the decision to strike frivolously; they strike as a last resort, often to address critical issues like unfair pay, hazardous working conditions, or job insecurity. When workers make the difficult decision to strike, they should be able to do so without fear of losing their livelihood.

Expanding unemployment insurance to striking workers is one practical, impactful step lawmakers can take to protect the rights for workers in their state. Lawmakers should seize this opportunity to strengthen labor standards, promote economic prosperity, and protect the fundamental right of workers to act collectively.

Data and methods

This brief uses publicly available data to assess the cost of extending UI to striking workers in the 13 states that have considered bills over the past two years. Data sources for this analysis include firm-level strike data from the Labor Action Tracker (a joint project of the Cornell ILR School & University of Illinois, Labor & Employment Relations School); employment data by state and industry from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW); and UI program data from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and state workforce agencies.

Time period

I combine 47 months of data from January 2021 through November 2024 to produce estimates that account for variation over time. Strikes occur at irregular intervals, with some years marked by higher labor activity than others. Including all available months of data ensures a comprehensive view of labor activity over this period.

Strike data are compared with unemployment insurance program data aggregated over the same 47-month period. Using program data from DOL—such as initial UI claims, total weeks compensated, and average weekly benefit amounts—I estimate the benefits that would be paid to strikers and calculate total state UI expenditures over this period. UI recipiency rates are based on 2023 full-year data.

Disaggregating participants of multistate strikes

Estimating the total number of strikers per state is complicated by multistate strikes. The Labor Action Tracker does not disaggregate the number of participants in strikes that span multiple states. To address this, I combine Labor Action Tracker data with industry employment data from the QCEW.

Table 5 illustrates this approach, using a 2021 strike involving approximately 1,050 Nabisco workers represented by the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union (BCTGM) in Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Oregon, and Virginia. The Labor Action Tracker provides the two-digit NAICS industry for each employer involved in a labor dispute. For each strike, I use the QCEW to sum the annual average employment in the relevant industry for each state involved in the strike. Next, I calculate each state's share of total industry employment by dividing its employment level by the combined total across all states. Next, I multiply each state's share of industry employment, by the aggregated number of strike participants (1,050 strikers in this case). This method produces an estimate of the number of strikers from each state.

Table 5

Disaggregating participants in multistate strikes, by state

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
Year	State	Employer	Labor organization	Industry	Strike duration (days)	State industry emp.	Industry emp. %	Total strikers (across all states)	Total strikers (per state)
2021	Colorado	Nabisco	BCTGM International Union	Manufacturing	42	151,159	9.5%	1,050	100
2021	Georgia	Nabisco	BCTGM International Union	Manufacturing	42	424,388	26.7%	1,050	281
2021	Illinois	Nabisco	BCTGM International Union	Manufacturing	42	578,638	36.4%	1,050	383
2021	Oregon	Nabisco	BCTGM International Union	Manufacturing	42	189,748	12.0%	1,050	125
2021	Virginia	Nabisco	BCTGM International Union	Manufacturing	42	243,842	15.4%	1,050	161
									= h × i

Note: BCTGM stands for the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers' International Union.

Source: Analysis of strike data from the Cornell University ILR School & University of Illinois LER School's Labor Action Tracker, January 2021–November 2024 and industry employment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, March 2023.

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Who’s on strike?

Using the methods detailed in Table 5**,** I tabulate the total number of strikes and strike participants in each of the 13 states that considered expanding UI protections according to the waiting period stipulated by state law. **Table 6** details the total number of qualifying strikes and strike participants over the 47-month period spanning January 2021 to November 2024.

Creating a final cost estimate

Finally, I combine data on strike participants and unemployment insurance program data to produce a cost estimate of UI for striking workers legislation, as shown in **Appendix Table 1**. This analysis proceeds as follows:

1. First, I calculate number of strikers likely to file a UI claim by multiplying the number of eligible strikers by each state’s 2023 UI recipiency rate (**c** × **d** = **e**).
2. Next, I determine the total benefits that might be paid to strikers by multiplying the estimated number of strikers likely to file a claim by the average weekly UI benefit amount and the average strike duration (in weeks) of all qualifying strikes (columns **e** × **f** × **g** = **i**). This represents the total benefits that would have been paid to strikers if such legislation had been in place from 2021 to 2024.
3. Comparing this total with the sum of state UI expenditures over the same period (**h** ÷ **i** = **j**) reveals that extending UI to strikers would have cost less than 1% of typical state UI expenditures.
4. Columns **k** and **l**, as well as **m** and **n**, present scenarios in which union members are assumed to have higher level of UI recipiency, reflecting increased claim rates and benefits paid to striking workers.

Table 6

Who's on strike?

Strike and participant counts in select states, January 2021–November 2024

State	Waiting period	Qualifying strikes	Qualifying strikers
California	14 days	31	238,663
Connecticut	14 days	2	1,750
Delaware	14 days	0	0
Hawaii	7 days	6	3,282
Illinois	14 days	22	10,368
Maryland	14 days	4	539
Massachusetts	30 days	6	5,665
Minnesota	7 days	10	7,881
New Jersey	7 days	5	2,645
New York	7 days	26	65,177
Ohio	7 days	12	7,569
Oregon	7 days	17	6,843
Pennsylvania	30 days	5	3,988
Rhode Island	7 days	2	132
Washington	7 days	11	11,969

Note: The Labor Action Tracker does not disaggregate the number of participants in strikes that span multiple states. To estimate the number of strikers from each state, I use industry employment shares from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. I calculate each state's share of industry employment in the relevant industry and multiply that share by the total number of strike participants. This provides an approximate distribution of strike participants across states.

Source: EPI analysis of strike data from the Cornell ILR School and University of Illinois LER Schools' Labor Action Tracker, and state industry employment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistic's Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages May 2023 data.

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Acknowledgements

I give my thanks to Johnnie Kallas at the University of Illinois LER School and Deepa Kylasam Iyer at the Cornell University ILR School for sharing data that comprise the Labor Action Tracker. I extend my gratitude to Emma Cohn for her expert research assistance.

Appendix

UI for striking workers cost estimates under different recipiency rate scenarios

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n
									At current recipiency rate		Assuming +20ppt recipiency rate		Assuming 100% recipiency	
State	**Waiting period**	**Qualifying strikes**	**eligible strikers**	**State UI recipiency rate, 2023**	**Strikers who apply for benefits**	**UI avg weekly benefit amount**	**Avg duration of qualifying strikes (weeks)**	**State UI expenditures, 2021–2024**	**Estimated benefits paid to strikers, 2021–2024**	**Striker benefits as % of UI expenditures**	**Estimated benefits paid to strikers, 2021–2024**	**Striker benefits as % of UI expenditures**	**Estimated benefits paid to strikers, 2021–2024**	**Striker benefits as % of UI expenditures**
California	14 days	31	238,663	42.6%	101,688	$332.89	7.3	$25,674,516,414	$245,692,579	0.96%	$361,020,332	1.41%	$576,643,537	2.25%
Connecticut	14 days	2	1,750	37.3%	653	$397.18	3.5	$2,344,478,976	$907,751	0.04%	$1,394,905	0.06%	$2,432,716	0.10%
Delaware	14 days	0	0	20.2%	0	$312.30	0.0	$261,137,971	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%
Hawaii	7 days	6	3,282	38.2%	1,252	$521.45	7.1	$819,051,764	$4,616,610	0.56%	$7,038,235	0.86%	$12,102,009	1.48%
Illinois	14 days	22	10,368	31.2%	3,237	$430.12	5.2	$8,661,100,873	$7,223,675	0.08%	$11,851,005	0.14%	$23,137,184	0.27%
Maryland	14 days	4	539	29.6%	160	$347.28	12.6	$1,576,198,443	$700,518	0.04%	$1,170,466	0.07%	$2,359,870	0.15%
Massachusetts	30 days	6	5,665	60.7%	3,439	$597.75	16.9	$7,615,414,867	$34,799,391	0.46%	$46,262,980	0.61%	$57,324,383	0.75%
Minnesota	7 days	10	7,881	49.5%	3,900	$491.23	3.6	$4,455,748,870	$6,951,615	0.16%	$9,760,961	0.22%	$14,047,611	0.32%
New Jersey	7 days	5	2,645	49.3%	1,303	$518.09	7.5	$9,104,297,783	$5,053,371	0.06%	$7,104,071	0.08%	$10,257,994	0.11%
New York	7 days	26	65,177	40.0%	26,065	$360.82	5.9	$12,336,393,670	$55,447,375	0.45%	$83,176,244	0.67%	$138,649,282	1.12%
Ohio	7 days	12	7,569	21.1%	1,598	$422.90	5.8	$3,287,773,793	$3,917,993	0.12%	$7,630,360	0.23%	$18,557,751	0.56%
Oregon	7 days	17	6,843	38.7%	2,646	$476.45	5.0	$2,601,122,300	$6,261,019	0.24%	$9,500,295	0.37%	$16,192,046	0.62%
Pennsylvania	30 days	5	3,988	35.3%	1,409	$406.19	8.0	$7,270,708,323	$4,594,920	0.06%	$7,195,368	0.10%	$13,005,351	0.18%
Rhode Island	7 days	2	132	53.5%	71	$413.20	16.1	$739,155,170	$471,493	0.06%	$644,586	0.09%	$876,578	0.12%
Washington	7 days	11	11,969	32.1%	3,846	$574.08	7.4	$5,504,827,505	$16,315,642	0.30%	$26,469,963	0.48%	$50,775,329	0.92%
					= c × d				*= e * f * g*	*= h ÷ i*	*= c × (d + 20%) × f × g*	*= k ÷ i*	*= c x f x g*	*= m ÷ i*

Notes: Labor Action Tracker data cover strikes that occurred between January 2021 and November 2024. Unemployment Insurance (UI) recipiency rates are based on data from 2023. State UI expenditure data span January 2021 through November 2024. State average weekly benefit amounts are calculated by dividing benefits paid by weeks compensated.

Source: EPI analysis of strike data from the Labor Action Tracker, a joint project of the Cornell ILR School and the University of Illinois LER School, January 2021–November 2024, unemployment insurance recipiency rates and monthly program data from the U.S. Department of Labor, and industry employment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), March 2023.

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Notes

1. North Star Policy Action analysis of strike activity from the Cornell University ILR School & University of Illinois LER School's Labor Action Tracker.

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