

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS

LOCAL NO. 49, 49A, 49B, 49C, 49D, 49E, 49L
MINNESOTA • NORTH DAKOTA • SOUTH DAKOTA

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Members of the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group:

On behalf of our total membership, thank you for recognizing the sacrifices and contributions of frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our union represents over 2,800 public sector members who were classified as essential workers under Governor Walz's Executive Order 20-20 and were required to continue reporting to workplaces. These city, county, and township workers maintained our streets, parks, water and wastewater facilities, airports and schools and while their work duties vary, these workers experienced strikingly similar experiences during the pandemic based on the essential nature of their work.

These essential workers were more likely to be exposed to COVID-19, increasing their personal health risk and the likelihood that they would miss work due to mandatory quarantine after exposure. Many of our members experienced multiple quarantine events, requiring them to utilize large portions of their PTO accounts. Many of these events were caused by factors outside of employee or employer control, including work conditions that lacked necessary PPE and/or did not allow for recommended social distancing. Workers also faced several conditions that increased the likelihood that they would need to utilize their PTO including rapidly changing travel restrictions, childcare needs, and frequent exposure to COVID-19 based on public interactions necessary for work. All the while, these individuals were classified as critical infrastructure workers and being mandated to continue reporting to work in person – sometimes even if the individual had tested positive for COVID-19.

Finally, I want to convey that while many highly compensated Minnesotans were able to work safely from their home offices, our public sector members did not have that luxury. Their livings were earned in the public space ensuring that water and electricity flowed, streets and airports stayed open, and our parks and trails were accessible and maintained. Despite the risks posed by COVID-19, they remained dedicated to our communities and showed up to work daily to ensure that our state's vital infrastructure was safe and reliable for all Minnesotans.

As your working group deliberates how to recognize these critical workers, we would be happy to provide specific examples from our membership. We appreciate your attention to these workers' contributions to our state.

Thank you for your time,

Nathan Runke – Regulatory & Political Affairs Coordinator