

**Lester Tear
before
Minnesota Frontline Worker Pay Working Group
Minnesota Legislature
July 28, 2021**

Members and Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Lester Tear and I live in Roseville. I consider myself a moderate. I hope that we can come together to agree on common sense solutions to help essential workers. I urge you to support providing premium pay to essential workers in grocery stores.

For the last 5 years, I have worked at Kowalski's in St. Paul in the produce department. I love working at Kowalskis. My co-workers and I did not have the luxury to be able to work at home when the pandemic began. We had to make sure that everyone could get the supplies that they needed to keep their homes running -- from fresh vegetables to formula to toilet paper to hand sanitizer to meat. We stayed open late so health care workers would be able to come to the store when they were off. We helped keep the state of Minnesota running.

Grocery stores were busier than ever during this time due to people switching from eating out to cooking at home, learning how to create sourdough starters, and pandemic supply hoarding. Some of my co-workers that are older or immune deficient could not work during the pandemic, which meant that we had to work short staffed and harder than ever. My coworkers and I stepped up to make sure our fellow Minnesotans were able to supply their homes during this difficult time.

All during this time, we came to work with the sheer terror of the unknown. We went from an open society to wearing masks. And then mask wearing become politicized, and not everyone willingly wore a mask. It was our duty to enforce the mask ordinance with no additional security from the company to help enforce. If we did not enforce the mask mandates, Kowalski's could be fined. So yet again, we did our job. I'm sure you have all seen videos online of how that can go. Now with the delta variant raging, the mask ordinance is gone, and we go to work without masks and never know if the customers we are interacting with are vaccinated or not.

Politicians asked grocery store workers to step up and serve our state by making us Tier 1 essential workers. We did our duty. We have all done our best to step up and it has been an honor. I was more prepared to do this, since I served overseas, so I have been trained to risk my healthy and safety for the country. When we serve in the military, we get combat pay for working in dangerous conditions. It only seems fair to give pandemic pay to grocery workers for working in dangerous conditions.

Not all of my co-workers survived the COVID-19 pandemic. My father who worked at a different grocery store dealt with daily stress and anxiety from the fear of going to work and being exposed to virus. Unfortunately, my father passed away due to heart attack from stress.

Please honor my father's memory and help support workers in grocery stores who have worked tirelessly every day through this pandemic by providing pandemic pay.

Thank you for your time today.