

**Cecilia Ramos, UFCW Local 663 member at JBS, for the
Frontline Worker Pay Working Group
Minnesota Legislature
Thursday, August 19, 2021**

Good afternoon Chair, and Commissioners. My name is Cecilia Ramos and I live and work in Worthington. I am here today to voice my support to this working group in favor of providing frontline worker pay for all frontline essential workers.

I'm a UFCW Local 663 member at JBS, and I have been there for 14 years. My current duties include building and breaking down boxes, going on the line, cutting meat, and other jobs as needed.

I became a union steward this year because I like to help people. I know when I started in meatpacking, another coworker helped me to understand the business, and now it is my responsibility to do that for others.

It started with rumors. A lot of people were hearing about co-workers getting the COVID virus and were getting scared at the JBS plant.

Has anyone here worked at a meatpacking plant before? We stand shoulder to shoulder in the line. Even though the company put in some plastic sheeting between us and we had masks and face shields - we could not be 6 feet apart from each other. There are around 1,700 workers in the plant all together on any given day.

I don't think it's hard to imagine how the outbreak happened. When too many of us got COVID, the plant was shut down, and we were told to go home.

My husband and I both work at JBS - we both got sick right away and were out for almost a month. Then, my 8 year old kid got sick, so I was out for another month to take care of him. I had lingering back pain as a symptom for 3 months after getting sick.

We went back to work as soon as we could.

We felt all of the demands--from the need and demand to provide for our family, and the demand from our community to maintain the food supply chain. We were not just deemed essential workers in Minnesota - there was a national executive order using the Defense Production Act to order plants to stay open.

We are thankful for the added safety precautions at work when the plant reopened. We are also thankful for the vaccinations. And we keep going to work everyday because we hold hope that things will one day get better.

You can't say meatpacking workers and our union family of healthcare and grocery workers were essential when people needed food, care and supplies, but are not essential now when it comes to acknowledging us with some hazard pay.

Please provide frontline essential worker pay to all essential workers.
Thank you.