



August 19, 2021

Minnesota Frontline Working Group
Minnesota State Legislature
75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021; Premium Pay Funds

Chairman Winkler; Members of the Minnesota Frontline Working Group

On behalf of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1189ⁱ which represents 10,000 members across the State of Minnesota, I appear before this Frontline Working Group and respectfully request its members support establishing a premium pay program using the \$250,000,000 appropriated to the state by the American Rescue Plan Act. Our membership includes retail grocery meat packing, processing, and healthcare workers who have worked on the frontlines of this pandemic since the beginning, putting their own well-being aside to ensure that our communities were fed and cared for.

I have been a union member for nearly 50 years, and I come from a union family. I started in 1973 with Country Club Markets in St. Paul, MN where I was a carryout, stocker, and checker. I came on staff with the UFCW in 1988 where I got my start in the grievance department.

Under Governor Walz's COVID-19 Executive Order No. 20, our members were classified as essential workers. However, we have always known that our members are essential in the communities they serve. As others were able to work from home, our members went to work to make sure that families could keep their pantries full and put food on the table. Our members went to work to make sure that the vulnerable and sick would receive the care they needed.

Grocery store workers showed up every single day often working 10-12 hour shifts throughout not only the pandemic, but through the days and weeks of civil unrest. With restaurants shut down, the people of Minnesota turned to grocery stores not only to buy food, but also as a place to gather and find community. Grocery workers served Minnesota families across the economic spectrum. They served other essential heroes like nurses, childcare workers, police officers, EMTs, teachers, and bus drivers. Without grocery workers, Minnesotans would not have been able to put food on their table.

Grocery workers came to work despite facing concerns about COVID-19 and the possibility of spreading it to their loved ones. They had to deal with the daily anxiety of customer reactions to COVID-19 masking protocols. One of the early incidents with this was where a cashier was ringing out a customer who had taken off their mask. When the member requested that the customer put their mask back on, the customer responded by screaming at the worker for trying to take away

their freedom and then continued on, degrading the cashier as a person because of how they looked.

At first stories like this were shocking, but then they became daily occurrences. Every member has a story of how a customer yelled or harassed them because of the COVID-19 mask rule, one even told us of a customer showing a concealed gun to another customer – just in case they were told to mask-up. So, on top of concern for becoming ill, they had to fear for their physical wellbeing.

The American Rescue Plan Act specifically allows the state to use its funds for premium pay for up to \$13.00 per hour for essential workers. Department of Treasury guidelines allows for premium pay to be awarded directly to workers or to their employers. **The law and subsequent guidance affirm that Congress intended for relief money to be used for premium pay to provide necessary financial help to frontline, essential workers.**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, 483 UFCW members have died from COVID-19 throughout the country and 93,900 have been exposed or contracted the virus. Our members have been coming to work throughout the pandemic. Their sacrifice should be acknowledged, rewarded, and compensated. This pandemic has shown that workers like our UFCW members are an integral part of our very existence. They are heroes.

Grocery workers have earned premium pay for their work. They did not sign up for this, but they did not waiver in their commitment to their community. **With our members and their sacrifice in mind, I call on you to ensure that our members receive the premium pay they deserve.**

A premium pay program for essential workers should be available to both full and part-time workers in grocery, meat packing, healthcare, and other industries making less than \$75,000 a year. Premium pay can be provided through an increase in fixed hourly pay or a one-time, lump sum payment given directly to the employee.

Frontline essential workers deserve not only our gratitude, but adequate protection and provision for their health, safety, and financial security. Establishing a premium pay program with the \$250,000,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act shows essential workers that the State of Minnesota sincerely appreciates the dedication and sacrifice of workers during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Jim Gleb
Local 1189 Secretary Treasurer

ⁱ UFCW International is the largest private sector union in the United States. UFCW International represents 1.3 million professionals and their families in healthcare, grocery stores, meatpacking, food processing, retail shops and other industries. Our members serve our communities in all 50 states, Canada, and Puerto Rico. Learn more about the UFCW at [ufcw.org](https://www.ufcw.org).