

February 8, 2021

Los Angeles City Council President Nury Martinez
200 North Spring Street, Suite 470
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Council file number 20-1609 Support for Hazard Pay for Grocery Workers

Dear Honorable Council President Martinez and LA City Council Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for the emergency, temporary ordinance of \$5.00 hazard pay for grocery and drug retail workers in the City of Los Angeles.

I am Rabbi Aryeh Cohen, the Rabbi-in-Residence at Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, a professor at the American Jewish University, and a member of the Shtibl Minyan prayer community. I am a Conservative Jew, and a resident of the 5th CD. A central tenet of my faith is gratitude for the good deeds and sacrifice of others. This is called *hakarat hatov* in Hebrew. I think this is applicable in this situation.

Grocery and drug retail workers have gone above and beyond during these unprecedented time and have been risking their lives providing a lifeline for our communities and keeping us fed. A vast majority of these essential heroes come from communities who have been devastated by the pandemic. Many grocery workers have become the primary earners in their households as families and our fellow citizens face widespread unemployment. To add to the current situation, working Angelinos, especially families of color, have also not been able to shelter in place throughout the pandemic because they are more likely to hold essential jobs and thus face an increased exposure to COVID.

Over the last couple of months, clergy, community groups, grocery and drug retail workers and UFCW 770 have been calling on grocery store corporations to reinstate hazard pay as companies see record profits. For example, major grocers, such as Kroger, which owns Food 4 Less and Ralphs, agreed to pay Los Angeles grocery store workers a \$2 an hour hazard pay increase in March, only to end it six weeks later in May. Meanwhile grocery store companies have seen their net earnings skyrocket this year, with Kroger reporting a 15.8% increase in sales and net earnings. While these companies have seen their profits grow and top executives receive pay raise workers such as cashiers, stock people, and deli workers see themselves counted among essential workers facing dangerous that they could not have imagined.

As COVID-19 cases are still at an alarming level and Intensive Care Unit capacity is still at breaking point in Los Angeles, grocery and drug store workers continue to face the risk of infection and endure a hazardous working environment. This is the right policy for this unprecedented moment. Grocery and drug retail workers deserve hazard pay. Large grocery chains can afford it. Los Angeles must lead as it always has in fighting for the rights and dignity of working people. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

Aryeh Cohen

Rabbi Aryeh Cohen, PhD