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August 30, 2021

Sent via email

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

**RE: VAX UP LA/ Covid 19 Vaccination Requirement Eligible Indoor Spaces
Including Retail (Council File 21-0878)**

Dear Council President Martinez and Fellow Councilmembers:

On behalf of Public Counsel and the Women & Girls' Rights Project, I am writing to express Public Counsel's support for the above referenced council action. Public Counsel is a non-profit legal services organization serving low-income individuals and communities in Los Angeles, and a proud member of the Fair Workweek Coalition - Los Angeles. Through our workplace justice program, the Women & Girls' Rights Project provides free legal services to low-wage women workers, and advocates for laws and policies that provide safe and equitable working conditions for women, LGBTQ individuals, immigrants and people of color.

As advocates, we are very cognizant of the fact that low-wage, essential workers in certain industries, including in the retail and grocery sector, have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Even with the vaccine, grocery and retail workers continue to be at high risk of contracting Covid-19 in their workplaces, and also face harassment from anti-maskers and anti-vaxxers, lack of on-site testing and social distancing, poor contact tracing, low staffing, and increased violence and theft. This is unconscionable and unsustainable as we seek to recover from the devastation of the pandemic.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that this ordinance include a requirement that stores provide a well-trained, full time health and safety officer for each retail establishment to enforce the vaccine requirement with customers, before they enter the store. Too often companies push the burden of enforcement onto their employees who are already understaffed. For example, in the City of West Hollywood an employee is assigned to each grocery store to enforce Covid 19 protocols including the mask mandate.¹ A similar policy requirement can be included in this ordinance. The health and safety officer could enforce the vaccine and mask mandate and any other Covid 19 orders. This position could also be another source of protection for workers and customers and monitor suspicious activity entering the retail establishment. A designated person, a health and safety officer could save the lives of thousands of Angelenos as we navigate the unprecedented nature of this pandemic.

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We strongly encourage the Los Angeles City Council to do everything to make this policy successful through strong enforcement. Retail companies must be part of the solution and staff their stores accordingly. During this crucial moment in the pandemic, Los Angeles should continue to lead and set precedent for other cities and counties to follow.

We thank the Council for its leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill Thompson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jill Thompson
Directing Attorney
Public Counsel