



September 22, 2020

Senate Interim Committee On Labor and Business  
900 Court St. NE,  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp, Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Jeff Anderson and I serve as the Secretary-Treasurer of United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555. I am here today on behalf of more than 29,000 members in Oregon and SW Washington from industries ranging from grocery and pharmacy to meat processing and healthcare. We are Oregon's largest private sector union.

It has been more than 180 days since the Governor's Executive Order 20-12 on March 23, asking Oregonians to stay at home. Six months. During this time our members have worked to keep grocery stores open to the public, made sure customers received their prescriptions, taken care of patients in healthcare settings, and helped keep the food supply chain moving.

Our members are risking their lives while serving the needs of the public. Many of these workers come into contact with hundreds of members of the public each day. They are scared. They have reason to be scared. To date at least 340 members of UFCW around the country have died after becoming afflicted with COVID-19. Over 21,000 have tested positive for the virus. We know of at least 144 cases within our Local, at 57 different locations, with 8 new cases in just the past week. We know these numbers do not include every case, as we are not getting data from many employers.

We've asked Governor Brown for help. We've asked the Legislature to act. We've been to the Management-Labor Advisory Committee. And still we wait.

The fact is the health and well being of people in our industries has not been prioritized, even at the basic level of access to personal protective equipment. The fact is, these workers were initially not even allowed to wear PPE at work, as it may "scare the customers." As late as March 17th, a member with a child at home who was susceptible to complications from the virus was told they would be disciplined for wearing a mask at work.

We have worked to maintain the food supply chain, while the Legislature has failed to act during not one, but two special sessions. There has been a collective failure by elected leaders on behalf of workers in Oregon. Oregon needs to step up.

Kentucky. Washington. California. These are some of the many states that have acted to protect their front-line workers by ensuring access to Workers Compensation for COVID-19 cases. But Oregon? Still out to lunch. We should have been a shining example of how we treat workers in our state. Failing to act to ensure workers have a rebuttable presumption of workers compensation for COVID-19 leaves workers on the front line feeling they are disposable. This is unacceptable.

It's an embarrassment that Oregon has failed to take care of its workers and their families. We have workers being discouraged from even filing workers compensation claims for COVID, being told that they should take sick leave or other time off, rather than workers compensation at 2/3 pay. There is no effort to educate workers on the fact that benefits through workers compensation are not taxed, and provides important long term health coverage if needed.

Without a rebuttable presumption for workers compensation there is no real incentive to do adequate contact tracing. Many workers are simply rejected or discouraged from filing claims. This has ripple effects throughout our communities as we continue to fight this pandemic.

We continue to have issues with workplace practices and exposure. Stores continue to limit hours for cleaning and aren't using one-way aisles per the recommendations of the CDC. Workplaces aren't socially distanced, and are failing to comprehensively check temperatures for incoming employees.

We've been here before. We've had these discussions. The time for action is now. Workers answered the call. They can no longer sit waiting. I am here to ask you to please stand with us. Help move this issue forward for the protection of the essential workers who are putting themselves in harm's way to serve you and our communities throughout Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeff Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeff" and last name "Anderson" clearly legible.

Jeff Anderson, Secretary-Treasurer