



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 20-1263, **Version:** 1

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Recommendation to request City Attorney to draft an urgency ordinance for consideration at the next City Council meeting to restore “Hero Pay” hazard pay to front-line grocery workers at a rate of \$4 per hour, to sunset 120 days after the approval of the ordinance.

[Since March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted the lives of people across this country. As of December 11th, 2020 there have been 20,636 deaths due to COVID- 19 across the country, including 290 in Long Beach. Locally, we have seen a significant spike in our local case rate. Since November, Long Beach’s average daily cases have increased by over 300%, and our daily positivity and case rate exceeds that of the County of Los Angeles. This led to, on December 6, 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom issuing a statewide stay-at-home order severely limiting capacity and in some cases the closure of, a number of businesses including gyms, salons, barbershops, recreational facilities, restaurants, and bars.

The global health pandemic has emphasized the importance of many workers in industries now highlighted as essential, including front-line grocery workers. Millions of frontline grocery workers nationwide have had to face new hazards in jobs not previously considered especially dangerous due to the virus. A recent article by the Long Beach Press Telegram quoted a representative of grocery workers as stating that local grocery chains have had nearly 900 members who have tested positive for COVID-19. This, while grocery stores across the country have seen recorded profits which, according to the Brookings Institute, found top retail companies had a 39% increase in profit averaging an extra \$16.9 billion in 2020.

Due to these shifting emergency circumstances, at the beginning of the pandemic, a number of grocery companies initially provided extra COVID-19 related compensation to their workers. This bonus, commonly known as “Hero Pay”, often was implemented as a temporary hourly wage increase or a one-off bonus for essential workers.

However, as the impacts of the pandemic subsided in June, many retail companies ended their temporary wage increase, and there has yet to be a meaningful commitment to restoring it. This has occurred even as the pandemic has continued to disproportionately impact low wage workers, leaving some grocery workers as the primary earners in their households. According to data collected by the Long Beach State Office in Economic Research, in LA County unemployment for jobs earning \$27,000 to \$60,000 per year have employment levels that are 8.5% lower than they were in January, and for those earning less than \$27,000 employment is 29.3% lower than January. This highlights the fact that unemployment is hitting Long Beach’s lower-income residents the hardest, and this is only highlighted further

as more non-essential businesses are forced to close their doors.

Fortunately, there is the promise of a vaccine moving forward. On Wednesday December 10th the City announced the Long Beach City Vaccination Plan for COVID-19. By the end of December, Long Beach will be receiving the first shipment of 3,900 Pfizer vaccine doses and by early January is expected to receive 11,600 Moderna vaccine doses. Phase two of the distribution includes essential workers, including those working in grocery stores, with the goal to be completed by the Spring 2021.

As Long Beach perseveres during this time of uncertainty, and begin heading down the path of economic recovery, it is critical that we support front line grocery workers with “Hero Pay”.

Due to the urgency of this item, no fiscal analysis was conducted.

Due to the urgent needs of essential workers during the pandemic urgency is requested.

Approve recommendation.

Councilwoman Mary Zendejas  
Councilmember Roberto Uranga, Seventh District  
Councilmember Rex Richardson, Ninth District