



May 21, 2021

Dear Members of the House and Senate Jobs Working Group, Speaker Hortman, Majority Leader Gazelka, and Governor Walz,

Working Minnesotans are hurting. More than a year of pandemic-induced economic hardship, risks and sacrifice on the job, and civil unrest has exhausted workers and made existing racial and economic inequities even worse. Working people need their lawmakers' help. Minnesota's Labor Movement urgently requests that you prioritize crisis relief, paid leave, and protections for working people in the Omnibus Jobs bill.

Crisis Relief

Many workers have relied on unemployment insurance due to the pandemic, and in response, the Governor made necessary temporary changes to the UI program. As the pandemic hopefully winds down, these measures should be extended through September 4, 2021, and not retroactively changed to the end of December 2020.

Among workers hardest-hit by layoffs were high school students and hourly school employees, who are ineligible for UI under current law. These workers have suffered for far too long and these exclusions should end without conditions.

Hospitality workers, many of whom are black, indigenous, and people of color, experienced some of the worst layoffs of any industry. These workers must have the chance to get their old jobs back as this sector recovers.

Premium pay for essential workers, which is provided for with federal dollars, should also be included in the final Omnibus Jobs Bill. These workers continue to staff the pandemic's frontlines and have risked their lives every day to meet the needs of their communities and to provide care for others.

Last summer's civil unrest following the police murder of George Floyd devastated working-class and BIPOC neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul. As Minnesotans have always done for one another after disasters, these communities should be provided the aid they need to rebuild.



Workplace Protections

This past year has shown that public health emergencies require swift action to provide workers some measure of safety on the job. The Governor's ability to issue Executive Orders for this purpose should not be undermined, both now and in future public health emergencies.

The pandemic strained OSHA's ability to serve its mission to keep workers safe and employers accountable. Minnesota should increase OSHA staffing, increase penalties to conform to federal OSHA rules, and make OSHA citations public to strengthen workplace safety. Businesses who flouted workplace safety rules in the pandemic should not be rewarded by eliminating the penalties they incurred as a result.

Minnesota should learn from the Husky refinery explosion and the pandemic and take further action to make workplaces safer, including Minnesota's oil refineries and meat processing plants. Refineries can be dangerous places to work, and they can put local communities at risk if they're not properly maintained. The refinery safety bill will keep refinery workers and nearby communities safe by requiring the use of a skilled workforce. Labor standards at meat processing plants must better protect the workers, a majority of whom are immigrants living in Greater Minnesota, who put food on our tables.

Now is not the time to go backward on protections that were hard-won by workers in recent years. The historic 2019 Wage Theft Prevention Act and the dedicated anchorage requirements for window cleaners should be left intact. The Public Employee Relations Board should be fully funded.

Paid Leave

Minnesota's frontline, essential workers who risked their lives every day of this pandemic did the right thing when they contracted or were exposed to COVID-19. They must be made whole for the unpaid time they spent in quarantine to keep everyone else safe.

The pandemic has also taught us the importance of time to care for ourselves and the people we love. It's time to enact paid leave laws so all workers can take short-term leave for minor illness or to deal with a dangerous situation, and up to 12 weeks of leave to care for their own or a loved one's serious medical condition or to bond with a new child.

This pandemic has made it clearer than ever that no matter where we come from or what we look like, working people need relief, stronger protections, and paid leave to take care of themselves, their loved ones, and to protect public health. We are asking you to meet the needs of Minnesotans hit hardest by the pandemic.



Sincerely,

AFSCME Council 5
AFSCME Council 65
BCTGM Local 22
Duluth Central Labor Body
East Central Area Labor Council
Education Minnesota
IAMAW District Lodge 77
IAMAW Local Lodge 112
Minnesota Association of Professional Employees (MAPE)
Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation
Minneapolis Regional Retiree Council, MRLF
Minnesota AFL-CIO
Minnesota Nurses Association
Minnesota State Retiree Council, AFL-CIO
Northeast Area Labor Council
OPEIU Local 12
SEIU Healthcare Minnesota
SEIU Local 284
SEIU Minnesota State Council
Southeast Minnesota Area Labor Council, AFL-CIO
St. Paul Regional Labor Federation
Teamsters Joint Council 32
UFCW Local 663
UFCW Local 1189
United Steelworkers District 11
UNITE HERE Local 17
West Area ALC Minnesota AFL-CIO
Working America

