



July 27, 2021

**Written Testimony of  
Peter Derouen  
Director of Political and Legislative Affairs  
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 791**

Joint Committee on Ways and Means & House Committee on Federal Stimulus and Census Oversight  
**Hearing on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding**

Mr. Chairmen and Members of the Committees:

My name is Peter Derouen, and I am the Director of Political and Legislative Affairs for the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 791. On behalf of Local 328, 791, 1445, 1459, & 371 of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union<sup>i</sup> (UFCW), which represents 24,000 members across the state of Massachusetts, I appear before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means & House Committee on Federal Stimulus and Census Oversight and respectfully request its members support establishing a premium pay program using funds appropriated by the American Rescue Plan Act. Our membership includes grocery store, food processing, food suppliers, transportation, healthcare workers, and other essential workers who have worked on the frontlines of this pandemic since the beginning, sacrificing not only their time and safety, but their lives as well. Under Governor Baker's COVID-19 Executive Order No. 13, our members were considered essential workers which mandated them to show up to work each day so that our state could function.

Members did not sign up to risk their lives during a global pandemic, yet they have continued to do their work professionally and effectively and deserve to be reasonably compensated for the risks they and their families have faced. Since the beginning of the pandemic, 482 UFCW members have died from COVID-19 while tens of thousands and their families have been exposed or contracted the virus. Our members have been coming to work throughout the pandemic and deserve to be compensated for the extreme risk that they and their families face every day. With our members and their sacrifice in mind, I call on you to ensure that our members receive the premium pay they deserve.

The American Rescue Plan Act specifically allows for the use of premium pay to go to essential workers. Recently released Department of Treasury guidelines allows for premium pay to be awarded directly to workers or to their employers. The law and subsequent guidance affirm that Congress intended for relief money to be used for premium pay to provide necessary financial help to frontline, essential workers.

We believe a premium pay program should address three main issue areas: which workers and employers should be covered, the total amount the state will be spending to support essential workers and the benefit amount per worker, and how long the program will last. A premium pay program for essential

workers should be available to both full and part-time workers in the grocery, food processing, transportation, healthcare, and other industries. Premium pay can be provided through an increase in fixed hourly pay or a one-time, lump sum payment given directly to the employee.

UFCW members in Massachusetts have been on the frontline of this pandemic. These workers have been risking their health and safety to ensure that our nation's food supply is safe, grocery store shelves are stocked, nursing home patients receive care and pharmacies are distributing medication.

Frontline essential workers deserve not only our gratitude, but adequate protection and provision for their health, safety, and financial security. Establishing a premium pay program with funds from the American Rescue Plan Act shows essential workers that the State of Massachusetts sincerely appreciates the dedication and sacrifice of workers during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

**Timothy Melia**

Local 328 President

**Russell Regan**

Local 791 President

**Fernando Lemus**

Local 1445 President

**Jeff Jones**

Local 1459 President

**Ronald M. Petronella**

Local 371 President

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<sup>i</sup> UFCW International is the largest private sector union in the United States. UFCW International represents 1.3 million professionals and their families in healthcare, grocery stores, meatpacking, food processing, retail shops and other industries. Our members serve our communities in all 50 states, Canada, and Puerto Rico. Learn more about the UFCW at [ufcw.org](https://www.ufcw.org).