

**Written Testimony of Melinda Edwards
Grocery Worker and Member of
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 75
Before
Senate Judiciary Committee
Ohio State Legislature
Wednesday, June 24, 2020**

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee my name is Melinda Edwards and I am a member of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 75, and I am testifying today in support of the workers compensation amendment in HB 606.

I have been a member of UFCW Local for over 42 years and I have been working at Kroger as a cashier since the outbreak of coronavirus in Ohio began. Although much has been done to protect workers at my store and in the community, there continues to be additional stress, fear, anxiety, frustration, and disappointment surrounding COVID-19. At nearly 70 years old, it is stressful continuing to go to work, not knowing if I may contract coronavirus from a customer who refuses to wear a mask – despite the fact that my co-workers and I continue to wear ours to protect them. My co-workers and I are in fear of customers and how they may react when we try and encourage them to socially distance and/or follow other best practices to keep ourselves and our families safe from this deadly disease. We are anxious because we know co-workers have and continue to be diagnosed with COVID-19 (at least 2 from my store alone), and that could be us soon. We are frustrated that other countries and states are taking more precautions to protect workers and communities and news reports indicate that thing will get even worse. We are disappointed that while being deemed “essential” by our companies and elected leaders, their lack of action to ensure we are protected at work makes it clear we are actually “expendable”.

Due to my age, I am in a higher risk category for fatal outcomes if I get coronavirus and often care for my aging mother (87) and father (89) years old. Because of their age they no longer drive, so I have to drive them to their doctor appointments and help around their home. While we do our best to follow all social distancing, sanitizing, and mask wearing recommendations, the fact is, I am worried I will catch it and pass it to them. Often considered an activist in my church and community, I have had to stop attending Sunday church services and volunteering to limit my risk of exposure. Worst for me, is not being able to celebrate my granddaughter Lessie graduating high school or hug my granddaughter Jessie on her 10th birthday.

The work that my co-workers and I do every day ensures Ohioans can feed their families. I am fortunate to be working, but I am on the frontlines every day and risking my health to feed my community. During the peak of this pandemic I was exposed to sometimes up to over 1,000 people a day in my store. This pandemic is far from over and my co-workers and I are still at high risk of exposure to coronavirus. Passage of this amendment would protect me if I ever contract coronavirus.

I deserve to go to a job everyday where my employer cares about my safety and does everything they can to make sure we don't get sick. I can say this to you today because I am a member of a union that supports me when I lift up my voice, but that is not true for every worker in Ohio. I hope that some of the other provisions of this bill that would protect bad employers do not become law.

I urge you to show your support for the workers like me that have kept our communities and families fed during this difficult time. Please support HB 606 and protect me from the anxiety and hardship of contracting coronavirus.

Thank you,

Melinda Edwards

Kroger

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