

**LOCAL 7 GROCERY WORKERS, COLORADANS FOR THE COMMON GOOD, AND
CONGRESSMAN JASON CROW (CO-06) CALL ON COMPANIES TO PROTECT
EMPLOYEES AND COMMUNITY DURING PANDEMIC**



[The Pueblo Chieftain: 'From heroes to zeros': Grocery store employees seek return of hazard pay as COVID-19 ramps up](#)

Alexis Smith

December 17, 2020

Grocery store workers belonging to United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7 made their case Wednesday for reinstating hazard pay and safety protocols during COVID-19.

They were joined by union leadership, Coloradans for the Common Good, faith leaders and the family member of a worker killed by COVID-19 for a virtual press conference to address the conditions grocery store employees throughout the state are facing.

“Our members, your employees, are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19, yet these heroes are being denied the Hero Pay you awarded them at the beginning of the pandemic,” Kim Cordova, UFCW Local 7 president, wrote in a letter to Kroger CEO Rodney McMullen. “Kroger’s employees went from 'heroes to zeros.’”

In March, Albertsons Companies announced hazard pay for all associates who worked for the pandemic, calling it “Appreciation Pay,” and days later Kroger followed suit, coining “Hero Pay.”

“Local 7 as well as UFCW International felt this was fair and showed our members that these companies valued their sacrifice,” said Melissa McCollister, political liaison for UFCW Local 7. “Unfortunately, as the pandemic raged on and stores became even more dangerous — both companies stripped workers of this.”

Since the hazard pay was dropped in June, McCollister added, there has been a 735% increase in positive COVID-19 cases in Kroger stores and a 1,285% increase in Albertsons and Safeway stores.

UFCW Local 7 represents 25,000 members in supermarkets, packing houses, food processing plants and health care facilities, along with barbers and cosmetologists, in Colorado and Wyoming. UFCW represents members of two Kroger chains — King Soopers and City Market — along with Albertsons Companies stores Albertsons and Safeway.

The union is getting support from Coloradans for the Common Good, a broad-based organization comprised of local institutions including congregations, unions, educational institutions and nonprofits.

"Leaders of CCG are here today out of our concern for grocery store workers who are essential workers and have been a particular risk during this pandemic," Marilyn Winokur of CCG said. "We believe we need to do everything in our power to protect them and our communities while they continue to work."

Winokur noted that CCG wrote letters to both Steve Burnham, president of King Soopers, and Todd Broderick, president of the Denver Division of Albertsons Companies, to ask for a meeting to discuss the concerns surrounding grocery store employees.

In both cases, Winokur said, the requests for a meeting were declined.

Kris Staaf, senior director of public affairs and government relations for Albertsons and Safeway said in an email that "the health and safety of our associates and customers has been a priority through the pandemic."

Staaf outlined various ways in which Safeway has worked to protect employees and customers, including utilizing social distancing stickers on aisle floors; daily safety compliance, coaching and training; installing health kiosks that screen associates; working with local health departments; offering curbside and home delivery at most locations; and recently introducing contactless payments at checkout stands and one-touch checkouts at fuel centers.

Staaf said the stores implemented plexi-glass protectors and have limited capacities for customers.

"We are deeply grateful for how our frontline associates have continued to serve their neighbors throughout 2020," Staaf said in the email. "In thanks, Albertsons Companies paid a Frontline Hero Award last week to all eligible store, distribution center and manufacturing plant associates."

Staaf said the reward will be equal to \$5 per hour for weekly average hours worked between Sep. 6 and Nov. 28.

The Pueblo Chieftain reached out to Kroger but did not receive comment by deadline.

Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo., attended the Wednesday news conference from Washington D.C., where he said he is pushing to help pass a stimulus deal or relief bill that would secure hazard pay for essential workers.

"My voice is by far not the most important here," Crow said. "I am here to show support for the frontline workers, the people that are working day and night to keep this country going.

"If this pandemic has shown us anything, it has shown us who really makes this country run.."

McCollister said grocery store workers have not just been let down by their employers, but also by "our broken Department of Labor." She said after two grocery store union members from a downtown King Soopers store in Denver died from contracting the virus from work and many members fell ill, Local 7 filed an OSHA complaint and grievance."

McCollister noted that during the investigation, OSHA never sent a team member in-person saying, “The irony was not lost on us. The same stores that our members work at every day were too dangerous for government employees to investigate.”

On Dec. 10, OSHA sent a letter concluding its investigation, saying it was issuing a hazard alert letter to the store with no citation.

Marlon Johnson and Maricela Guzman, two King Soopers employees, and Sandy Chavez, a Safeway employee, all said they did not feel safe going into their respective workplaces because management does not enforce mask wearing and social distancing or monitor traffic flow. They noted that sanitation is not performed regularly, their stores have been understaffed and the managers do not inform associates when an employee has been exposed to the virus.

Nikki Trujillo was present to represent her brother, Randy Narvaes, who was a King Soopers employee for 30 years before he died after contracting COVID-19 at work.

“I never want another family to feel the pain his absence has left us, especially now during the holiday season,” Trujillo said, noting that her family doesn't want to hurt Kroger's business because that would hurt the workers.

But she said Kroger continues to put its workers at risk as stores get even more crowded during the holidays at the same time spread of the virus is exploding.

“We have clear guidance from the health authorities, and Kroger knows what procedures to put in place to help keep workers, customers, and our communities safe,” Trujillo said.

Both CCG and UFCW Local 7 noted the two main asks are for stores to reinforce hazard pay and safety measures to keep workers, customers and communities safe.

“We just want to sit down with the company and actually bargain for appreciation pay for the workers who are making all of the money for them,” McCollister said.

[The Denver Post: Feds won't cite King Soopers for safety violations at Denver store where 3 workers died from COVID-19](#)

Noelle Phillips

December 16, 2020

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration will not cite a Denver King Soopers store after a months-long investigation into working conditions that was triggered by the deaths of three workers from COVID-19.

OSHA issued a letter Dec. 2 to King Soopers store #29 on Ninth Avenue in Capitol Hill to recommend safety precautions, but the agency did not levy any citations.

Melissa McCollister, political liaison for the United Food & Commercial Workers Local 7, the union that represents King Soopers employees in Colorado, called the probe a “farce,” saying OSHA never sent investigators on site to evaluate safety measures because they didn't want them to be exposed to the novel coronavirus.

“The stores our workers work in every day were too dangerous to investigate,” McCollister said.

Store management was not enforcing a mask mandate, and inspectors raised concerns that proper cleaning was not happening inside the store, according to a copy of OSHA’s letter provided to The Denver Post by the union. The agency also recommended the store’s management limit occupancy, designate six-foot separation zones throughout the store, add more hand sanitizer and provide N95 masks to employees who must work in the narrow back room/deliveries area, the letter said.

“OSHA will not issue a citation to the King Sooper (sic) Store #29 in Denver Colorado at this time,” the letter said. “However, improvements could be made to improve your approach to protecting employees from SARS-CoV-2.”

A King Soopers spokeswoman did not respond to a request for comment.

In September, OSHA [announced a \\$15,000 fine of JBS USA](#) for failing to protect employees at its Greeley meatpacking plant after six workers died and hundreds were infected. That penalty was criticized by the same union as being far too lenient given the loss of life.

McCollister’s criticism of OSHA’s King Soopers investigation came during a Wednesday news conference at which workers, union officials and religious leaders asked the King Soopers and Safeway grocery chains to restore a hazard pay that was in place during the early days of the pandemic. Kroger, the parent company of King Soopers and City Market, [gave employees a \\$2 per hour raise](#) — called a “Heroes Bonus” — between March 31 and May 17. Safeway gave a \$2 per hour pay increase between March 20 and June 14, McCollister said.

Since the hazard pay was dropped, COVID-19 cases have continued to rise inside the two chains’ stores across Colorado, she said.

Nikki Trujillo, whose brother Randy Narvaez died after contracting COVID-19 at King Soopers’ Capitol Hill store, said it was too late to help her brother but called on Kroger to reinstate the extra pay.

“While King Soopers was quick to call workers like my brother a hero with a fancy video announcing ‘hero pay,’ they were just as quick to take it away as infection rates rose,” Trujillo said.

Narvaez, a 30-year employee of the supermarket chain, died of COVID-19 on May 17. Karen Haws, a courtesy clerk, was the first store employee to die, on April 10. She had worked for the store since 2019. James McKay had worked for King Soopers since 2009, and he died on May 23.

On Wednesday, King Soopers employees expressed fear over catching the virus as they described customers without face coverings, hazardous conditions in stockrooms caused by overworked employees and bathrooms without soap and paper towels.

Marlon Johnson, a King Soopers deli worker, said he must work because everyone else in his family has been laid off. He cried when talking about missing his granddaughters because he’s afraid he could contract the virus and spread it to them. Johnson called on King Soopers managers to enforce mask-wearing at his store, describing what happened recently when he asked a security guard to talk to a customer about it.

“He said, ‘What do you want me to do about it?’” Johnson said. “Let that sink in for a minute.”

[CBS 4 Denver: COVID In Colorado: Grocery Store Employees Union Calls For More Protections During Pandemic](#)

Jennifer McRae

December 16, 2020

Grocery stores in Colorado remain open and have been operating throughout the pandemic. Their employees are considered essential, but many feel they are not receiving the protection they deserve.

The Local 7 employees union and Essential Grocery Workers nonpartisan organization of unions are calling on grocers to take better care of their employees. They are asking Kroger and Safeway to reinstate a \$2 per hour hazard pay bump. They also want more health safeguards.

“Local 7 wants both grocery companies to prosper because that means that our communities have access to food and essential services, and our members have jobs,” said UFCW Local 7 political liaison Melissa McCollister in a statement. “However, we implore both to ensure our members’ safety and by extension, that of our communities, and pay them the Hazard Pay they deserve.”

Employees and family members of workers joined the campaign. One woman spoke about her brother who worked for Kroger and died of COVID-19 in May.

“We want Kroger to stop hurting workers like my brother through their inaction. Kroger continues to put their workers at risk,” said Nikki Trujillo.

In a statement, King Soopers said its priority is to provide a safe environment for all its employees. It will continue to listen to its associates to ensure their wellbeing.

“If this pandemic has shown us anything, it’s shown us who really makes this country work, who really makes this country run. And it’s our grocery store workers, our delivery truck drivers, our janitors, our nurses, our teachers, the American worker, who is putting themselves, their lives on the line, their families on the line, to make sure that all the things that sometimes we take for granted, get done,” said Congressman Jason Crow in a statement. “And I just can’t thank you all enough, but thanks is not enough...truly what you need is support, you need hazard pay, you need clean and safe working conditions, you need our community and our lawmakers to step up and to support you in the way you deserve to be supported because of the work that you have done.”

[NBC 5 KOAA: Colorado grocery store workers ask for reinstated hazard pay](#)

Alasyn Zimmerman

December 16, 2020

In the last month, Colorado has seen an increase in hospitalizations and cases surge in the COVID-19 pandemic. While many businesses face restrictions grocery store workers in the state say their employers aren't doing enough to keep them safe.

Members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 7 are calling on its employers King Soopers (Kroger owned) and Albertsons/Safeway stores to reinstate a hazard pay of \$2.00 an hour that stopped in May.

Earlier this month Coloradans for the Common Good, an organization made up of unions, civic groups, and congregations sent a letter to the grocery store companies asking for a meeting to discuss the risks grocery store workers are facing during the pandemic.

"From the time I walk into that building until the time I leave, I don't feel safe in there," Marlon Johnson, a King Soopers employee said in a press conference Wednesday morning.

Workers in Wednesday's press conference detailed conditions in their stores of social distancing and mask mandates not being enforced, and some bathrooms not having proper supplies.

"A lot of local governments have done a good job of having certain restrictions in place for these grocers to abide by. A big problem that we're having is that companies themselves just aren't enforcing them," Melissa McCollister, political liaison for the union said.

The union said Wednesday they would be open to discussions and bargains with grocery stores on the exact details of the hazard pay.

[Fox 31: King Soopers employee union makes a statement](#)

Colleen Flynn

December 15, 2020

A union representing grocery store workers projected a message on the sides of several King Soopers stores in the Denver metro area on Monday night to get a point across.

UFCW Local 7 is pushing to reinstate a \$2 an hour bonus for frontline workers. King Soopers paid that bonus at the beginning of the pandemic, but took it away in May. Employees say they face dangers everyday going to work during the pandemic to keep stores running and the community fed.

UFCW Local 7 and UFCW Local 21 with U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders [wrote a letter to Kroger CEO](#) Rodney McCullum addressing the issue. Kroger is the parent company that owns King Soopers and City Market.

The company responded to FOX31 saying that since March it has invested more than \$1.3 billion in bonuses for associates and says it has executed dozens of safety measures to protect employees.