

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
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SEPTEMBER 1, 2020

Expanding Worker Protections in Los Angeles County

These are uneasy times for workers. Los Angeles County (County) has experienced unemployment rates of approximately 20% over the past few months, and the total unemployment claims in the State of California since March 8, 2020 has surpassed 7.1 million. For those who are continuing to work, many are being forced to make the difficult decision to choose between their financial well-being and their health at high-exposure jobs, including at factories (estimated at 316,000 persons in the County), retail stores (369,000), and restaurants (217,800). A July 2020 study by the California Employment Development Department Labor Market Information Division indicated that workplace transmissions account for almost half (47.7%) of COVID-19 cases, and these impacts are particularly felt among the Latinx and Black workers that represent a disproportionately large part of the essential workforce.

As the economy adapts to, and ultimately transcends, the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not only a moral responsibility, but an economic necessity, that efforts are taken to strengthen and expand the protection of the County’s workforce, particularly for those in low-wage and vulnerable jobs. Studies by the Brookings Institute and Harvard Business Review have shown that strong worker protections that drive down job vulnerability, such as investments in training, benefits, and predictable scheduling, decrease turnover and

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increase productivity, preserve employer-employee relations, and attract economically complex industries that accelerate regional economic growth.

For example, simply creating more control and stability in work schedules for shift workers can have a dramatic impact on both the lives of many residents and the County's public systems of care. According to the Shift Project from the University of California, Berkeley, service-sector workers with a 50% swing in unstable work shifts experienced a 13% higher risk of hunger hardship and an 11% higher risk of residential hardship compared to workers who have stable hours.

Accordingly, the County should explore opportunities to streamline and expand the resources available for employees and employers to create healthier work environments. This should include the potential creation of a single office that would centralize the County's various worker protection efforts, including the minimum wage and Fair Chance Ordinance enforcement, dispute resolution, and other related initiatives. Such an office would also develop and promote policies and standards that support the County's workforce, particularly for those that are more vulnerable to substandard work environments.

WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Direct the Interim Director of the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs, in coordination with the Chief Executive Officer, County Counsel, and the Directors of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services and Department of Public Health, and in consultation with relevant stakeholders, to report back to the Board of Supervisors in writing within 60 days on how the County of Los Angeles (County) can improve and centralize efforts related to protecting and enforcing workers' rights, including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Establishment of an Office of Labor Equity, which would promote and enforce the County's labor laws, as well as lead labor policy research and development with a focus on racial, health and economic equity, including potential funding and implementation plans to enable adequate enforcement authority; and

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2. Centralizing, under the Office of Labor Equity, various worker protection initiatives including wage enforcement, dispute resolution, outreach, and other relevant programs and educational information currently offered by various County Departments.

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