

Protecting Essential Workers in the Fast Food Industry

The COVID-19 crisis continues to impact some communities more than others with disproportionate health and economic burdens in Black and Latinx neighborhoods. That reality is especially felt in certain sectors such as the fast food industry where workers are overwhelmingly people of color. These are employees whose work often goes unnoticed – but they are the definition of essential. The COVID-19 pandemic has made that clear. Fast food workers took no time off and when the shelves of grocery stores were bare, many people relied on fast food restaurants for their meals. This impact was most felt on the Latinx community, many of whom are unable to work from home.

Yet, still, their treatment does not always reflect their essential role. There have been reported instances of retaliation against these workers when they rightfully request safety measures in response to COVID-19. Their calls for action must be addressed. This public health threat has been raised by workers employed by the McDonald’s on Marengo Street in Boyle Heights. There, it was reported that McDonald’s was allegedly in noncompliance with the most basic COVID-19 safety precautions and allegedly retaliated

MOTION

SOLIS _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

KUEHL _____

HAHN _____

BARGER _____

against employees who raised concern. In fact, there have been six complaints filed with the Department of Public Health and Cal/OSHA since June 2020 about this McDonald's alleged failure to comply with necessary precautions including the mandated Los Angeles County Health Officer Order. On October 6, 2020, SEIU Local 721 issued a letter expressing the need to address the employees' continued concerns and recommended actions. Reports of alleged inadequate personal protective equipment, infrequent disinfecting of surfaces, and lack of information must be addressed immediately. The safety of our communities depends on it.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct County Counsel and the Department of Public Health, with other relevant departments, to investigate the complaints raised in the letter dated October 6, 2020 from SEIU Local 721 and to issue a response within 15 days to all points raised in the letter.
2. Direct the Department of Public Health, working with the Chief Executive Office to identify funding, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Economic Resiliency Task Force, to contract with faculty or researchers from local academic institutions whose research focuses on working conditions and labor standards of low wage workers to investigate working conditions in the fast food industry, including by partnering with organizations that advocate for fast food workers in Los Angeles County to document workers' first-hand experiences in fast food workplaces.

#

HLS:mr