

Contact:

Kent Patton

Kent.Patton@snoco.org

425-388-3883

Snohomish County Leaders Propose COVID-19 Related Hazard Pay

Front-line, public-facing county employees and certain grocery workers in unincorporated county would be included

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., June 8, 2021 – Today, Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers proposed ordinances to the Snohomish County Council to provide supplemental pay to front-line, public-facing county employees and certain grocery workers in unincorporated Snohomish County. With the re-opening of businesses later this month, the tightening labor market, and the spread of new variants, this supplemental pay will ensure essential government functions and access to groceries is uninterrupted.

“Our frontline workforce has been putting themselves at significant personal risk for the last 17 months providing ready access to food, shelter, safety, and other essential government services,” said Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers. “While these proposals are short term measures, these essential workers have earned this supplemental pay. As the labor market tightens, it is vital that we retain a healthy and motivated workforce to serve our communities. These measures will ensure we keep all our systems functioning as we transition toward recovery, while still keeping disease transmission to a minimum. I urge the County Council to swiftly consider and approve these ordinances.”

“Our county workers and grocery employees have kept our essential services running during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we will continue to rely on them for the next phase of pandemic response and recovery,” said Snohomish County Council Chair Stephanie Wright. “During this unprecedented and dangerous event, these workers continue to provide ready access to food and vital services and have more than earned our respect and additional support.”

“It’s time to show our appreciation to frontline workers by providing adequate compensation with hazard pay for the hardships they continue to endure during one of the most challenging times of the last century,” said Snohomish County Council Vice Chair Megan Dunn. “We are asking large grocery stores to provide hazard pay and be responsible employers, and in turn we are offering hazard pay to our frontline workers. All work has value—from bagging our groceries and stocking shelves to driving snowplows and protecting the public—and we value the sacrifices of our frontline families.”

During the pandemic, the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office reported an increase in mental health and suicide-related calls, with a large spike in January of 2021. The Snohomish County Human Services Department also reported an increase in demand for services during the pandemic, including an increase of over 30% in housing and shelter related calls between April 2020 and March 2021. Snohomish County Solid Waste Division reports an increase of 7% in tonnage handled from May 2020 through April 2021.

The proposed ordinances would provide a one-time hazard payment (\$1,250) from federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to those front-line Snohomish County employees who throughout the pandemic have been public-facing and engaged in essential government services. Grocery workers would receive \$4 per hour in hazard pay until either the Governor lifts his state of emergency or December 31, 2021 at 11:59 p.m.

Grocery employees and front-line county employees have been working under hazardous conditions for almost 18 months. They are working in these hazardous conditions now and will continue to face safety risks as the virus presents an ongoing threat, including the threat of more contagious variants, for an uncertain period.

"Snohomish County Sheriff's Office law enforcement and corrections personnel have put themselves on the front lines of the pandemic since the very beginning," said Snohomish County Sheriff Adam Fortney. "Without an option to work from home, our staff have continued to serve our community with integrity and selflessness, and we appreciate this show of support to county front line employees for the essential work they've done over the last 18 months."

"All workers have been a critical part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including Snohomish County AFSCME workers. Council 2 is proud to support the effort to provide additional, well-earned hazard pay for eligible employees who have been required to maintain public-facing, front-line jobs during the pandemic," said Director of Staff Services for AFSCME Council 2 Miguel Morga. "These ordinances are a good way to ensure that many workers receive additional compensation for the sacrifices and the hardships they've endured and continue to endure performing valuable services for Snohomish County's residents."

"The Snohomish County Deputy Sheriff's Association would like to formally express our thanks and gratitude to Snohomish County Government for their proposal for an upcoming payment for our members who have worked tirelessly thru the COVID pandemic," said Matt Boice, President of the Snohomish County Deputy Sheriff's Association. "While much of our community were able to work remotely to help stop the spread, Snohomish County Sheriffs Deputies did not hesitate to face the pandemic head-on and continue to work in the field responding to 911 calls for assistance from our citizenry. We have, and always will, continue to heed the needs of our community, even in the face of danger, unrest, or uncertainty. Thank you to the men and women throughout Snohomish County Government Leadership who made this happen. We appreciate it and will continue to do our part to make Snohomish County a safe place to live, visit or explore."

"On behalf of the Snohomish County Corrections Guild, I would like to thank the County Executive and County Council for their proposal to recognize the County's front-line workers during this unprecedented time by providing a payment to the front-line workers of Snohomish County," said Chuck Carrell, President, Snohomish County Corrections Guild. "This proposed payment will mean a lot to all of our members who have come in to work every day during this pandemic, despite the risk to their health,

and the health of their loved ones. This job comes with a lot of risks already, but the COVID outbreak was a risk of the unknown on an unprecedented scale. Despite these new risks, our members came in to work every day and did the job that needed to be done to keep the community safe. I know that all of the men and women at the Snohomish County Jail will appreciate this gesture of gratitude by the elected county leaders, and I would like to thank everyone in county government who are working to make this happen.”

Ensuring that grocery and public-facing county employees are compensated for the substantial risks of working during the COVID-19 emergency promotes retention of these vital workers. Retention of these employees is fundamental to protecting the health of the community and access to food.

This ordinance is immediately necessary in response to the COVID-19 emergency because the health threats that grocery and certain county employees face remain significant, and COVID-19 variants may further increase transmission of the virus and reduce therapeutic treatments. This is a rapidly evolving situation, with disproportionate risks and adverse impacts for BIPOC communities, that should be addressed without delay.

The proposed ordinances were transmitted to the Snohomish County Council today for their consideration.

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