On August 2, 2022, the Seattle City Council voted to repeal the city’s $4 per hour COVID-19 pandemic “hazard pay” requirements related to grocery employees. Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell approved the measure the next day.

As the pandemic persisted into the early days of 2021, the Seattle City Council enacted the Hazard Pay for Grocery Employees Ordinance, which required grocery businesses in Seattle to add $4 per hour of “hazard pay” to the rate of pay of grocery employees who were required to work during the pandemic. This $4 hourly premium had to be added to the wages of each employee regardless of an employee’s otherwise applicable hourly base pay rate. The law applied to stores with 10,000 or
more square feet of grocery space and to certain other grocery businesses as well. The Seattle ordinance also required that signs be posted to ensure employees knew their rights, and it prohibited grocery businesses from altering their pay rates or structures in order to avoid or offset the hazard pay requirement.

Although vaccines arrived, and then boosters, and although infection and hospitalization rates also dropped, the Seattle City Council had been reluctant to repeal the hazard pay requirement. At least arguably, the council’s position was vindicated when infection and hospitalization rates increased earlier this year. However, with COVID-19 infection and hospitalization rates again in decline and with the city moving closer to a pre-pandemic “normal” of sorts, Mayor Harrell asked the council to repeal the hazard pay requirement. The council voted 5-2 on August 2, 2022, to end the requirement. This action followed Governor Jay Inslee’s recent announcement that some of his COVID-19 emergency decrees were being withdrawn as the state continued its effort to return to some semblance of normal.

Seattle’s hazard pay requirement remains in effect for thirty days after the August 3, 2022, repeal of the ordinance.


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