

SURVEY:

WORKING CONDITIONS AMONG CONNECTICUT RETAIL EMPLOYEES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

As the state of Connecticut continues to implement measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus, a majority of retail workers at essential businesses still face working conditions with a high risk of exposure, and without access to hazardous duty pay, healthcare benefits, paid sick leave, and/or adequate access to testing.

Further compounding the problem, jobs in the retail service sector are typically characterized by low pay and few fringe benefits, and workers employed in the service sector have little control over the days and times that they will work.

Currently, just over 156,000 workers are employed in Connecticut's retail service sector. The median hourly wage for a cashier is \$11.73.¹

To assess the working conditions of frontline retail workers during the public health emergency, Connecticut Working Families conducted an online survey of retail workers between March 24 and April 4. A non-random sample of 164 workers across the state completed the survey, providing an overview of working conditions as they relate to wages, work scheduling and safety. Survey respondents were given the option of submitting responses anonymously throughout the survey.

The poll found that a majority of workers do not feel safe and have not received any extra compensation despite taking on greater risks at work. While some essential businesses have provided small pay increases or one time bonus payments, worker sentiment shows that the extra compensation that employers have provided (or intend to provide) is not enough to maintain financial security should they get sick. Additionally, workers experienced greater degrees of instability over their work schedules. Employer scheduling practices, such "on-call scheduling" and/or last minute schedule changes (that may result in lost hours or time for personal responsibilities) have only been exacerbated by the crisis.

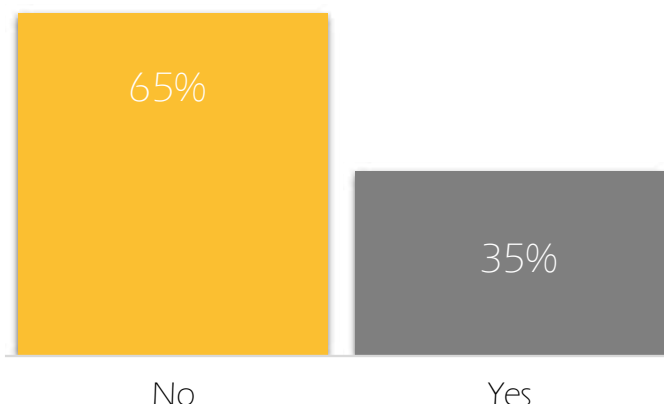
SURVEY RESULTS:

WAGES:

Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, some companies have increased pay to workers, attempting to provide some compensation to employees for the increased risk they face in the workplace. However, a significant majority of retail workers have not received any extra compensation.

According to the survey, 65% of respondents have not received a wage increase or a one-time coronavirus-related bonus.

Since the coronavirus, have you received any extra pay apart from your hourly wage from your employer?



WORKERS' VOICES:

“They’re offering unpaid leaves to seniors or those with a serious underlying condition like me. It’s not a choice though. I have to work. I have to get paid. So that’s where we are at.”

Manager at Rite Aid, Madison.

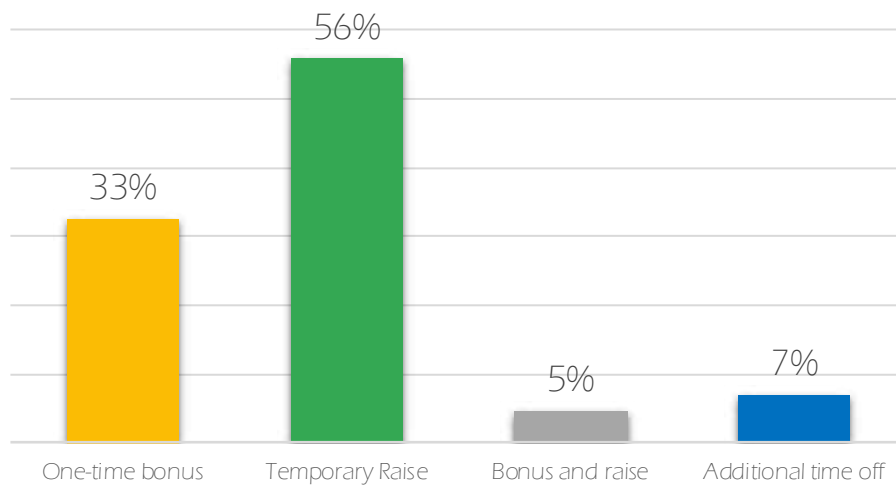
“We were eventually given a month of PTO, but because we’re still open we’re not encouraged to use it. We’re not paid enough to risk our health like this.”

Store Manager, Food/Beverage Store, Stamford.

Among the 33% of workers who have received extra compensation, hazardous duty payments have been nominal:

- 56% stated their employers have issued (or intend to issue) a temporary increase during the pandemic (\$2 per hour, on average).
- 33% received a one-time bonus (\$273, on average), but no extra hourly pay.
- 5% received a small one time bonus and hourly pay.
- 7% received additional paid time off, but no wage increase or lump sum payment.

Additional compensation received

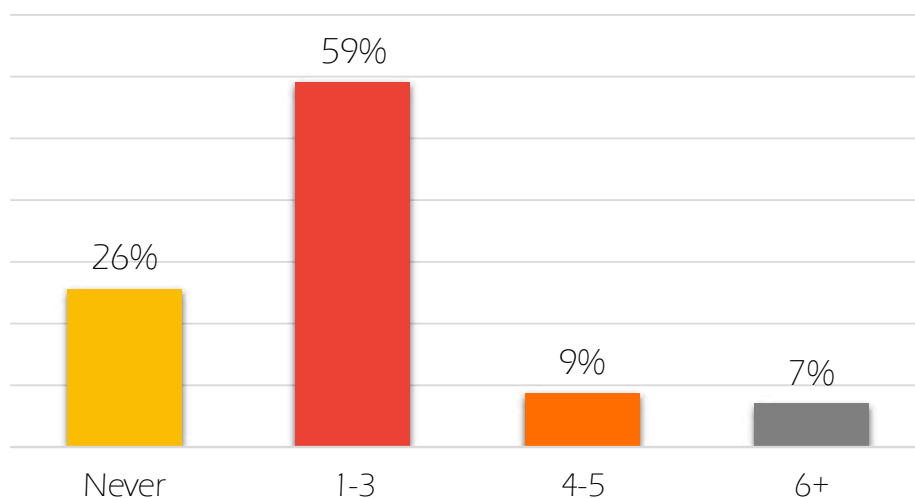


WORK SCHEDULES

Notice of schedules:

Respondents described considerable instability in work schedules, often receiving notification of work schedule with very little notice.

How many times per week are you asked to make last-minute adjustments to your work schedule?



- 43% get their schedules less than 7 days in advance.
- 24% receive schedules less than 3 days in advance.
- 42% say that they have less control of their work schedules since the coronavirus outbreak started.
- 35% said they cannot decline a shift without fear of retaliation.

On Call Scheduling

- 74% have been asked to make last minute changes to their schedules at least once a week.
- 61% of respondents were asked to make changes to their schedule during a shift, usually working additional hours more than they had been scheduled.

Rest period between shifts

Erratic schedule changes are associated with fewer hours of rest for many workers. More than half of those surveyed (55%) say that they have had fewer than 11 hours between shifts on multiple occasions, leaving them with little time to rest or be with their families.

How has COVID-19 affected the amount of hours you work?

The retail workers in the sample have experienced significant changes in their work hours. Almost half of respondents (48%) percent were working longer hours while 23% had their hours cut. While many stores have been overscheduling employees to accommodate unprecedented levels of consumer demand, many respondents pointed out that many have remained open but with policies enforcing social distancing, like curbside pickup, or by opening only a smaller section of the store, requiring lower staffing levels. In some cases, even high-traffic stores are operating with skeleton crews either to cut costs or because some workers had to take sick leave or could not work as many hours due to lack of childcare.

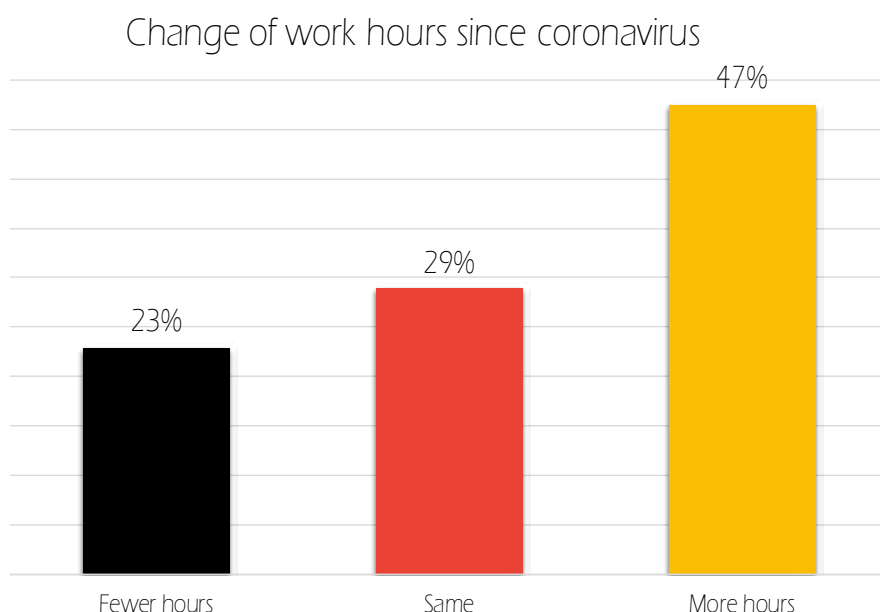
WORKERS' VOICES:

"You are made to feel bad for saying no. Going for a promotion and saying no will bring retaliation by the district manager for not being a team player."

Store Manager, Walgreens, Torrington.

"They may cut my hours if I decline a shift and act rudely to me for it."

BJ's Wholesale Club, Stock Associate, Derby.



Since the onset of the coronavirus, retail employees are:

- 47% are working more hours.
- 23% have seen their hours cut.
- 70% of respondents in our sample were working more than 30 hours a week before the crisis.

WORKERS' VOICES:

“I have personally provided all the PPE and most of the sanitizer and chemicals to clean. They expect us to clean regularly and at high frequency and to remain open but haven’t provided the means to do so. I no longer feel safe. They don’t care if we are exposed or if customers are exposed. Only that they don’t have to pay anyone. ””

Store Manager, Rite Aid, Madison.

WORKER SAFETY:

Seven in ten workers said that they did not feel safe where they work during the survey period. It is worth noting that this data was collected before Governor Lamont’s executive order #7S², introducing safety rules for stores, and #7BB³, which mandated the use of masks or face coverings in public. The responses show that there was a clear need for state action to ensure the safety of retail workers as businesses were not doing enough to protect workers on their own.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The overall picture from this report is one of instability. Retail workers in Connecticut are under considerable pressure, with erratic and unstable schedules, low pay, and a very high risk of contracting the virus. Connecticut Working Families recommends that the state implements the following steps to provide retail workers with adequate protections to ensure their financial stability and safety.

- Designate grocery, retail and food processing workers as “first responders” so that they receive immediate access to coronavirus testing; priority access to childcare; and access to paid sick and family leave, as needed.
- Provide strong guidance to essential businesses recommending “hazard pay” increases to hourly wages for all retail employees. Hazard pay wage increases should be equal to at least one and a half times an employee’s regular rate of pay for every hour worked while the state operates under an official “state of emergency” status, as declared by the Governor of Connecticut.
- Require employers to provide access to posted schedules at least 14 days in advance.
- Provide predictability pay for reduced hours that occur within the 14-day notice period at a rate equal to one half an employee’s regular rate of pay for each scheduled work hour that is cut.
- Require employers to provide a rest period of 9-11 hours between shifts.
- Allow workers to decline unscheduled hours without fear of retaliation.
- Allow workers to request a flexible working arrangement to accommodate familial responsibilities.



ENDNOTES

- 1 https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ct.htm#41-0000
- 2 <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-7S.pdf>
- 3 <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-7BB.pdf>