Dear Elected Leaders:

Harris Teeter is strongly opposed to SB0486 and urges Maryland's elected leaders to undertake a complete economic impact assessment to fully understand consequences of any proposed mandatory essential worker wage-increase bill before moving forward.

Our guiding principles throughout this pandemic have been safety, transparency and investment in our associates and stores.

Harris Teeter is committed to paying competitive wages and benefits to our nearly 35,000 valued associates – 2,700 in Maryland. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Harris Teeter has invested significantly in infrastructure and enhanced safety protocols – including, but not limited to providing PPE, protective shields at checkout, health screenings and temperature checks, enhanced sanitation measures – to protect our frontline essential workers and shoppers, as well as to provide thank you pay, bonuses, and additional health and emergency leave benefits. We often operate above and beyond requirements of local and state ordinances to ensure we were protecting our greatest asset – our people.

In addition to these physical and financial investments, Harris Teeter has provided education and additional resources to our valued associates specifically related to their mental well-being. Our leaders have also been provided education and resources for how to support associates' physical and mental well-being amid this time of great uncertainty.

The proposed SB0486 ignores these commitments and ongoing efforts and would have significant, negative impacts at the worst possible time.

The proposed increases in pay would substantially increase the cost of food and groceries for Maryland's residents and families. Higher grocery costs would hurt Maryland families at a time they are already struggling to put food on the table – and would be especially harmful to low-income and disadvantaged communities.

Grocery workers across our country became essential personnel overnight – touted as Heroes – and we have answered the call to support our communities by providing open, clean and stocked stores. Hazard pay mandates could harm the Heroes they are intended to help. Higher costs could force organizations to reduce the number of workers, available hours and even locations.

In addition, hazard pay mandates could make it more difficult for many grocers, specifically, to stay afloat, especially independent grocers, small markets, ethnic grocers and grocery stores in disadvantage communities already struggling to keep their doors open. Harris Teeter – like most grocers operates with thin margins, even during the pandemic.

This bill is rushed and not adequately researched. We urge our elected leaders to pause the vote on any extra pay initiative until you complete a full analysis of the costs, impacts on local families and our community, and input from businesses.

Sincerely,
Valued Harris Teeter Associate