

May 4, 2023

Via email

Dear Councillor,

Re: Proposed Amendment to Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 510-5

We are writing to you on an urgent matter.

It has come to our attention that the City's Economic and Community Development Committee has recommended amendments to the Toronto Municipal Code, expanding the number of designated retail businesses operating with 'tourist area exemption' status. The stated objective is to expand the number of retailers allowed to open for business on statutory holidays.

Councillor, we are writing to express our profound disappointment that this Committee has advanced such a contentious proposal without public consultation, including among working people, to whom this policy will directly affect.

Since the inception of the City of Toronto Act, retail businesses (including the owners of Yorkdale Mall) have sought – and been consistently denied by City Council – the ability to open their stores on statutory holidays. Our union has raised major concerns that such an expansion of the policy will create more job instability and scheduling precarity among city retail workers.

Despite claims of "lost sales" made by the big businesses behind this effort, it's the workers themselves – those expected to staff these stores on statutory holidays – who suffer from less rest time, family time, and guaranteed time off the job. Big businesses know this, but clearly do not care. Not a single point of concern was raised on this point in Councillor Colle's background letter to the Economic and Community Development Committee, which is very concerning.

Past City Hall consultations on the matter of holiday shopping, including proposed amendments to the relevant bylaws, have been detailed and robust. By and large, since 2006, these consultations have led to the same conclusion: workers deserve time off the job. It is no different now. The fact that the Committee's recommendation has surfaced outside a proper public consultation, and three weeks ahead of a final vote at City Council, can only be viewed as a cynical way to push through a policy long opposed by working people.

Our union represents thousands of retail workers across the City of Toronto. It is imperative that our members, and all retail workers, have a say in any policy that will potentially limit their ability to take time off the job on statutory holidays.

We ask you to vote no to this recommendation at City Council.

We ask that a proper, city-wide consultation take place in advance of any expansion to the tourist exemption under the Municipal Code, as well as the development of criteria and a process to determine such areas. And we ask that such consultation explicitly include soliciting the views of impacted workers, themselves.

We would be happy to discuss this matter with you further, at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Naureen Rizvi
Unifor Ontario Regional Director

Gord Currie
President, Unifor Local 414

NR/GC/ja:cope343