

Chairperson Lefor and members of the Industry, Business, and Labor Committee

I am Kim Kessler and I and my husband own and operate Bronson's Marketplace grocery stores in Beulah and Bowman North Dakota. I am here to support House Bill 1175

Below is the timeline our stores experienced with Covid 19 pandemic:

- In early March, we noticed the uptick in shopping and buying trends, leading us to post on our business Facebook "We have Toilet Paper" 😊. Little did we know this was more than just a 'bad weather forecast' which also leads to an uptick in shopping and buying trends in a grocery store.
- One week later, we again used Facebook to let customers know 'We apologize for empty shelves, we are doing everything we can to keep what you need stocked in our store'. We were very busy. Our business is used to working hard during holidays or bad weather forecasts to supply our customers with what they need, so this felt like a long holiday season or major blizzard warning.
- One day later our status changed again. Our Facebook post was now "Please do not come in our store if you are sick. Only elderly and people with compromised health should shop the first two hours of the day". After this first week of experiencing the onset of the Covid pandemic:
 - We closed business early so that staff could stay and clean and disinfect every door, edge of cases, all high touch surfaces in our grocery store and back room.
 - We searched for alternate suppliers so that we would be able to offer eggs, bread, flour, hand sanitizer and basic things like spray bottles.
 - We Limited what customers could buy in order for everyone to be able to get what they needed.
 - We encouraged staff to stay home if they were at all sick.
 - We closed our Deli/Bakery by the end of March as one person was sick and we feared that all working in that area had been exposed. Once their covid test was negative, we had them all come back to work.
 - Being in customer service, it was hard to stagger work shifts; but we did as much as possible. Customer service was put on the back burner as we had less staff during the busiest hours of the day so that employees could work early shift and others work late shifts; making their time spent working together less.
 - Our policies changed as we required people to stay 6 ft apart as much as possible. To wear a mask, and to clean/disinfect throughout the day.
 - We limited talking with customers even, we were basically trying to keep our employees healthy so we could stay open.
- In a couple weeks' time, we had totally changed the way we do business. Customers waiting was now normal, out of stocks was not our top priority anymore. Keeping people healthy and trying to supply basic needs was now all we focused on.
- We also had to ask customers to please get their groceries and leave our store. Social gatherings were happening in our stores and we knew that this was not ok for our employees to have to deal with.
- We are Thankful for all the resources from the State Commerce Dept and places like NDGA that we received. Their direct communication helped in sorting thru the mounds of information that

was being sent to businesses. Frankly, we were so busy trying to keep our business open, we depended on our Grocer's Association to keep us up-to-date on the latest info and policies that.

We took many steps to protect our employees who were literally at the forefront and working front-&-center with a disease that we were still unsure of. We supplied masks, gloves, plexiglass, and face shields. We changed our breakroom to allow for social distancing and disinfecting after each use. We allowed any staff that wanted to cut their hours of work or wanted to limit their exposure - to take a leave of absence. They were able to come back to their jobs with no change in status.

In closing I would like to remind the Committee that we were designated as an "essential business". We were expected to stay open and to provide for the needs of our communities. House Bill 1175 recognizes the difficult situation we were put in and affords us protection from frivolous civil law suits. The grocery industry in North Dakota rose to the challenge and provided goods and services in a manner that protected their customers and employees.

We ask that the Industry, Business and Labor Committee acknowledge the commitment we made and support HB1175

Thank you and I will take questions