

## **Mario Sandoval testimony**

Hello, my name is Mario Sandoval. I am a food server at Binion's on Fremont Street in Downtown Las Vegas, and I've been a Culinary Union member for 39 years.

Today, I'm here to talk about how cuts to healthcare and unemployment have affected my life, how workers must be protected when they return to work, and how job security and the right to return to our jobs when business reopens can give me and thousands of workers in Nevada the hope we need to get through this pandemic.

I was raised in Las Vegas, Nevada. I started working in Downtown Las Vegas when I was 16 years old. I've been working at the job I have now since I was 21. I've seen the economy go through changes during 9/11 and during the 2008 recession, and I've had to personally walk out on strike and live without pay, but I've never lived through an economic situation like this before.

Right now, I'm receiving unemployment benefits because my workplace isn't open. The extra \$600 payment on top of my regular unemployment payment helped me survive through most of the year. Now that the extra \$600 was not renewed, I am in a \$750/month deficit with my bills every month. My daughter took on the extra burden to pay my bills on because I don't have the money. It puts her in a difficult place.

I'm worried about the economy crashing again. We can't get a job in this town right now, and some of our workplaces have not opened, so what will we do? Not only do we need unemployment benefits extended, but we need a regular stimulus check to be sent to every person in this country to help us get through this pandemic. We also need to make sure that all workers have the right to return to their jobs when business reopens or resumes.

Right now, my coworkers and I are fighting for that right to return to work in Clark County, where fabulous Las Vegas is located. We are urging our county commissioners to pass an ordinance that would protect workers like me who have lost our jobs due to COVID-19 and through no fault of our own. Companies should not waste time and money trying to hire and train new people when there are people like me with so much experience just waiting for our workplaces to reopen. We should not be replaced or abandoned for younger workers when we've spent our lives working for our companies. We should not have to start our careers over when we are so close to retiring with dignity.

Knowing I have a job to return would give me hope, and hope can take me a long way. I love my job. I have good pay, great health benefits, and live comfortably. My job helped me to raise my four kids. I dream about it now. That's all I have right now, those dreams, but I could have hope, too, if I was guaranteed to have my job back when the restaurant reopens.

Here in Las Vegas, we know things are going to go back to normal eventually. People are going to come back to our wonderful city. It costs the company nothing to bring me and my coworkers back to work. That's why my coworkers and I are fighting so hard to make sure that

we get called back to our jobs. We helped build our industry. The least the industry can do for us is save our jobs. All workers, union & non-union need the right to return to work. All workers need hope.

All workers also need to the highest safety standards when they return to work. My union fought for workers like me to be protected if we get called back to work by passing first-in-the-nation worker safety legislation about COVID-19. I know that if my company recalls me, they will have to follow strict state laws, that I will have free COVID-19 testing, days off for quarantine if I am exposed, and that my work place will be inspected often by the state health district. I think all workers should have that kind of protection.

Last, but definitely not least, I am worried about health insurance coverage. When I went on strike in the 1990's, it was because I needed health insurance for my children. Right after the strike ended, I found out that I had brain cancer, and I needed that insurance for myself. Now, I have been in remission for 29 years, and my children are all grown, but I have other health conditions that require me to take medicine every day. I'm covered for a little while longer under my current health insurance plan, but when that ends, I will have to find a way to be covered because my medications alone cost over \$1,000- I am only receiving about \$1,000 in unemployment a month.

I definitely can't afford to pay \$885 out-of-pocket for COBRA benefits, and I don't know anyone who can. I have to have health insurance to pay for the four prescriptions I need to stay alive. I can't forgo coverage, and I can't pay the high cost of COBRA. I need Congress to make sure that COBRA benefits are 100% covered, especially because the crisis we are facing right now is due to a deadly disease – we absolutely need health insurance.

Workers need Congress to work on policies that will protect us. Please do the right thing and make sure working families in America can pay their bills, stay in their homes, and have healthcare during a deadly pandemic. Please work on policies that guarantee a worker's right to return when business resumes, and policies that make them safer if they do get called back. That would give working families like mine hope, and we really need that hope right now.

Thank you for the opportunity share my story today.

## **Adolfo Fernandez Law**

VICTORY! The Culinary Union's Adolfo Fernandez Bill has been signed into law!

First-in-the-nation: The Adolfo Fernandez Bill is the first state law in the United States to require comprehensive measures to protect employees and customers against the spread of COVID-19.

New standard in Nevada's tourism industry: The Adolfo Fernandez Bill requires hotels and other lodging facilities from Bellagio to Motel 6 in Clark County and Washoe County to follow new cleaning and practical standards to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Covers all workers in the tourism industry: It covers more than 280,000 workers in Nevada whether they are union or non-union, from housekeepers to bartenders, from dealers to clerical workers, from security guards to front desk staff, from cooks to cocktail servers.

The law now requires:

- \*Enhanced cleaning

- \*Handwashing, social distancing, masks, and training

- \*Testing and contact tracing

These worker provisions in the Adolfo Fernandez Bill are the result of five months of the Culinary Union having thousands of one-on-one conversations with workers, two different car caravans on the Las Vegas Strip with over 10,000 Nevadans participating, dozens of public comments before the Nevada Gaming Control Board and Gaming Commission, and drafting, researching, and consulting with experts on the health and safety language in the Bill.

The Culinary Union applauds Governor Sisolak, Majority Leader Nicole Cannizzaro, Speaker Jason Frierson, and the Nevada Legislature on the passage of the bill, and thanks the Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD) for their leadership during this pandemic.

## **Right to Return**

In mid-March, 98% of the Culinary Union's 60,000 workers were furloughed when casinos were ordered to close during a COVID-19 shelter-in-place directive.

Culinary Union contracts currently have recall language that vary from casino to casino ranging from 6 months to 2 years.

Recall language means that workers have the ability to be brought back to work without re-applying, re-interviewing, spending time going through orientation and training again, etc.

Under the recall language in the contract, workers are not brought back by manager whim or favoritism, but by seniority. Example: The workers who have been employed as the casino longest and were hired on Day 1 are brought back first.

It is early September and still about 50% of the 60,000 members are still NOT back to work and they have no idea when or if they will be recalled.

If you work in a casino where there is only a 6 month recall language, you will be permanently separated from your job if you are not recalled back to work yet. It's been 6 months.

**VICTORY, FIGHT CONTINUES:**

The Culinary Union just won agreements protection 36,000 MGM and Caesars workers to have 2-year recall rights!

That's a guarantee that even if you don't work for 2 years, when things are back to normal and business can resume 100%, then all workers will be automatically brought back to work. Seniority intact. Pay rate protected. No re-applying or jumping through hoops or starting at the beginning!

The fight continues to win the same protections for 24,000 workers who are employed at other casinos on the Las Vegas Strip and Downtown Las Vegas, including for unionized workers at Station Casinos.

**RIGHT TO RETURN:**

The Clark County Commission needs to protect workers and place a Right to Return ordinance on the agenda.

A Right to Return ordinance would require employers to offer all workers throughout several industries in Clark County, the right to return to their jobs, if the employee had been laid off or furloughed due to COVID-19, when the business reopens or resumes operations.

The Right to Return ordinance would protect all workers - union and non-union in the following industries: Hospitality, convention and trade shows, airport, entertainment, and hospital workers throughout Clark County.