



1110 Dr Martin Luther King Jr Dr
Suite 304
Milwaukee, WI 53203

mashworkers.org

Peter Rickman
PRESIDENT

Kenneth Green
VICE PRESIDENT

Lisa Weiner
SECRETARY

Troy Brewer
TREASURER

June 26, 2023

Steering & Rules Committee
Common Council of the City of Milwaukee
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Chair Perez and Steering & Rules Committee Members:

On behalf of the Milwaukee Area Service & Hospitality Workers Union (MASH) I write to encourage you to vote in favor of adopting the sales and use tax ordinance.

None of you created the root causes giving rise to a dire fiscal condition for our City government. We all recognize that decisions by State policy-makers over years shorted municipal governments and ours in particular. All of you do bear the burden of addressing this challenge now and each of you must take a decision and a vote no one believes to be easy.

When our organization advocates in front of you as Council members on other matters, we never demand that you fix another matter of urgency and importance in Milwaukee with one single vote. MASH always calls on you to act in order to address the twin crises of economic and racial inequality and injustice with what is in front of you at the moment with the power in your hands.

When our leaders and members raise these weighty issues, we never expect that you can fix the fundamental problems of the racialized income inequality economy then and there because we know one vote will not do that, no single policy decision can alter it on its own, and usually you as City policy-makers do not have the full suite of tools you would need to do so. Most of the time the circumstances are less than ideal to make progress on building an economy, a service sector labor market, and a city for all of us.

That seems an apt characterization for what you confront today: An actual crisis, State-imposed limitations, decades of action and inaction well beyond our and your control, and imperfect policy tools, amongst other relevant considerations.

As an organization of low- to moderate-income people in the multi-racial service sector working class, we do not love the idea of additional sales taxes. No doubt you recognize that the incidence of sales taxes tend to fall disproportionately on working people. However we believe that doing nothing poses a greater negative impact on working class Milwaukee than adopting this sales tax increase.

We will pay more of our incomes already too low because of inadequate wages and real income for work in the service and hospitality industries. However, without this City revenue, municipal service cuts will cost us more. Streets in worse condition will harm our vehicles and cost us in upkeep and repairs. Garbage collected less frequently will compromise the quality of life in our neighborhoods. Closed libraries will erode the future of our children. Lessened code enforcement will impact the places we find housing. Less coverage and slower response time in emergency services will inevitably hit us at the worst times. We are the people who need a robust and effective government working on behalf of ordinary folks — we will bear the brunt of disastrous cuts. If our City governmental fails and our city becomes unlivable, we are the ones who will be here still with declining prospects. This will cost each of us in the service sector working class much more than the 2% sales tax increase, with consequences for us and our families for generations.

We also recognize that this sales tax will not fix City finances nor ensure the municipal services we want and need. But adopting this sales tax, staving off unimaginable cuts to municipal services allows Milwaukee to fight on for another day when broader alternatives and additional policy options can be on the table. Imposing this sales tax will impact us adversely; but doing nothing in this moment will hurt us more in the near- and long-term.

Your affirmative votes today do not sanction anything that came before this moment and instead only take up what you can do right here, right now. As you consider your votes, we ask that you vote for Milwaukee's service sector working class to have a municipal government still working to improve our lives and futures.

Sincerely,

Peter Rickman

President, Milwaukee Area Service & Hospitality Workers Union