

July 26, 2010

To: Pam Stafford
Mayor of Rohnert Park
and Rohnert Park City Council
City Hall
130 Avram Ave.
Rohnert Park, Ca. 94928

Dear Mayor Stafford and Rohnert Park City Council members:

On behalf of the North Bay Labor Council, I am writing to express our strong opposition to the proposed expansion of the Rohnert Park Wal-Mart discount store to become a supercenter.

We are particularly concerned about the potential loss of good jobs in the grocery industry. Sonoma State economist Robert Eyster estimates that the supercenter will contribute to job quality decline and increase the problem of working poverty. According to his analysis, the county will lose 105-211 jobs---mostly good jobs that pay hourly wages for full-time workers ranging from \$17.67 per hour at Pacific Market to \$23.36 at Raley's and Safeway. The Wal-Mart supercenter will employ 450 workers – an addition of 85 new jobs to its present workforce. The typical full-time worker at Wal-Mart earns \$12.10 an hour.

Currently, one-third of the employees in the county are the 'working poor' and do not earn a self-sufficiency or 'living wage.' According to the Insight Center for Community and Economic Development in 2008, two parents working full-time in Sonoma County must each earn \$14.90 an hour or \$62,940 a year to pay for food, housing, medical care, child care, and transportation.

Moreover, the expansion of Wal-Mart will increase the number of workers who do not have employer-provided medical benefits. According to the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, no more than 50 percent of Wal-Mart workers have medical benefits. In comparison, nearly 80 percent of employees at unionized Raley's, Safeway, Food Maxx, and nonunion Costco in Northern California have employer-provided medical care benefits.

Most importantly, the North Bay Labor Council is concerned that Wal-Mart is the largest employer and the most anti-union corporation in America. Wal-Mart employees have no labor protections and are systematically denied the right to organize a union and to bargain collectively for better pay, wages, and working conditions. As a consequence of Wal-Mart's legal and illegal union-busting tactics, not one Wal-Mart store in the United States is unionized.

After an extensive two year investigation of Wal-Mart's labor practices that included interviewing dozens of former Wal-Mart workers and managers, the respected

international organization, Human Rights Watch, in a 2007 report, “Discounting Rights: Wal-Mart’s Violation of U.S. Workers Right to Freedom of Association,” concluded that:

“Wal-Mart is a case study in what is wrong with US labor laws. It is not alone among U.S. companies in its efforts to combat union formation, following the incentives set out in unbalanced US labor laws that tilt the playing field decidedly in favor of anti-union agitation. It is also not alone in violating weak US labor laws and taking advantage of ineffective labor law enforcement. But Wal-Mart stands out for the sheer magnitude and aggressiveness of its anti-union apparatus and actions,” and that “Wal-Mart’s aggressive campaign to prevent union formation creates a climate of fear at its stores,” and finally, “based on our research we conclude that the cumulative effect of Wal-Mart’s panoply of anti-union tactics is to deprive its workers of their internationally recognized right to organize.”

Between 1998-2003, according to UC Santa Barbara historian Nelson Lichtenstein, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) issued more than 98 unfair labor practices complaints against the giant retailer. The NLRB found that Wal-Mart prevented employees from distributing union literature, threatened workers with the loss of bonuses or closure of a store if they unionized, engaged in unlawful surveillance and interrogation of employees, and illegally disciplined or fired pro-union workers.

In 2008, Wal-Mart settled 63 federal and state class-action lawsuits charging the company violated wage and hour laws by failing to pay workers for overtime and off the clock work, and denying workers meal and rest breaks. Wal-Mart agreed to pay at least \$352 million and up to \$640 million to present and former employees. Moreover, the company faces the largest class action suit in history on behalf of 1.6 million past and present female employees for wage discrimination and promotion gender-bias.

Finally, Wal-Mart is leading the opposition to legislation pending in Congress, the Employee Free Choice Act that will protect the right to organize by strengthening penalties for illegal violation of workers rights during an organizing campaign, and by providing an option for majority sign-up, that would require employers to recognize a union when a majority of workers have signed union authorization cards.

We urge you in the strongest possible terms, to deny Wal-Mart’s superstore proposal.

Sincerely,

Lisa Maldonado
Executive Director
North Bay Labor Council

Jack Buckhorn
President
North Bay Labor Council