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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW -- GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS --
GROCERY STORES

Introduced By: Senators Lawson, Lauria, DiMario, Euer, Zurier, Cano, Kallman, Murray,
Mack, and Bissaillon

Date Introduced: February 12, 2024

Referred To: Senate Commerce

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Findings.

2 The general assembly finds and declares that:

3 (1) Grocery stores provide many people with their primary place of social connection and
4 sense of community. This activity is particularly true for the elderly;

5 (2) The increasing use of self-service checkouts, where the customer does not interact with
6 a human, contributes to social isolation and related negative health consequences;

7 (3) Elderly customers and customers with disabilities often lack the confidence or ability
8 to use self-service checkouts;

9 (4) Self-service checkouts increase the risk for shoplifting, credit card theft and hacking of
10 customers' personal information;

11 (5) Self-service checkouts essentially turn customers into unpaid employees and allows
12 grocery retailers to decrease labor costs and actual customer service;

13 (6) Self-service checkouts contribute to retail workers feeling devalued and adds efficiency
14 pressures on workers as well as encourages grocery stores to allow longer lines for check-out stands
15 staffed by a cashier to encourage customers to use the self-service checkout;

16 (7) Self-service checkouts allow grocery stores to rely more heavily on part-time
17 employees, positions which do not provide retail workers with a living wage or access to benefits;

18 (8) Many retail workers, particularly those with a part-time schedule, qualify and receive

1 income-based public benefits such as food stamps (currently known as Supplemental Nutrition
2 Assistance Program benefits or "SNAP"), and subsidized healthcare;

3 (9) Because people of color are overrepresented in cashier positions, which is the lowest
4 paid position in retail businesses, the increasing use of self-service checkouts has a disproportionate
5 negative impact on people of color.

6 SECTION 2. Title 6 of the General Laws entitled "COMMERCIAL LAW — GENERAL
7 REGULATORY PROVISIONS" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

8 CHAPTER 60

9 GROCERY STORES

10 **6-60-1. Definitions.**

11 As used in this chapter:

12 (1) "Grocery store" means a retail store in the State of Rhode Island that earns the majority
13 of its gross income from the retail sale of groceries and sells primarily household foodstuffs for off-
14 site consumption, including the sale of fresh produce, meats, poultry, fish, deli products, dairy
15 products, canned foods, dry foods, beverages, baked goods or prepared foods. Other household
16 supplies or other products shall be secondary to the primary purpose of food sales.

17 (2) "Manual checkout station" provides human assistance to shoppers, scanning, bagging
18 and accepting payment for their purchases.

19 (3) "Retail sale" means the sale of groceries to a consumer for use or consumption, and not
20 for the purpose of resale.

21 (4) "Self-service checkout" means an automated process that enable shoppers to scan, bag
22 and pay for their purchases without human assistance.

23 **6-60-2. Restriction on number of self-service checkouts in grocery stores.**

24 Grocery stores shall not have more than six (6) self-service checkout stations operating at
25 any one time per location.

26 **6-60-3. Minimum manual checkout.**

27 Grocery stores with self-checkout stations shall have a minimum of one manual checkout
28 station per self-service checkout station.

29 **6-60-4. Enforcement.**

30 (a) The consumer protection unit of the department of attorney general ("CPU") shall have
31 primary authority to enforce the restrictions of this chapter.

32 (b) The CPU shall enact rules and regulations as necessary to implement this chapter. The
33 fine for the first and second violations shall be five hundred (\$500) dollars. The fine for third and
34 subsequent violations shall be one thousand (\$1,000) dollars.

1 (c) Any Rhode Island resident may file a complaint with the CPU alleging a violation, free
2 from fear of retaliation.

3 (d) Any employee alleging retaliation by their employer for making a complaint alleging
4 violations of this chapter may bring a cause of action in Rhode Island superior court.

5 (e) Any Rhode Island consumer alleging a violation of this chapter may file a complaint
6 with the CPU. Retaliation against a consumer for complaining about a violation of this chapter shall
7 be an unlawful trade practice.

8 **6-60-5. Severability.**

9 If any part, section or provision of this chapter is found unconstitutional, illegal or invalid,
10 such a finding will affect only that part, section or provision of this chapter and the remaining parts,
11 sections or provisions shall remain in full force and effect.

12 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

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1 This act would require grocery stores to specifically limit the number of self-service
2 checkout units to six (6) units per location. The consumer protection unit of the department of
3 attorney general would have authority to enforce these restrictions.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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