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## **Petaluma City Council expands protections for hotel workers laid off during coronavirus pandemic**

The local hotel worker recall ordinance applies only to the seven hotels in city limits that have 50 or more guest rooms, and comes after local labor groups and hotel workers urged the city to take action.

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Local hotel workers laid off amid the coronavirus pandemic now have the right to reclaim their jobs, as Petaluma's city council this week ushered in greater protections for hospitality sector employees most impacted by the pandemic-induced recession.

Petaluma's worker recall ordinance, passed by a unanimous council vote Monday, goes a step beyond a similar state law targeting the hospitality sector that Gov. Gavin Newsom signed last Friday.

The council's decision to move forward with worker protections ensures a longer period of notice for rehires, the option for legal action on behalf of aggrieved laid-off employees, requirements that employers provide written notice to laid-off workers and a more expansive definition of workers eligible for protections - requirements that go beyond the recently signed Senate Bill 93.

The local ordinance applies only to the seven hotels within city limits that have 50 or more guest rooms, and comes after local labor groups and hotel workers urged the city to take action. A handful of laid off Petaluma Sheraton Hotel workers, their union, Unite Here, and North Bay Jobs with Justice organizers have led the charge.

"This is a really crucial lifeline for workers in the hospitality industry who have been among the hardest hit amid mass lay-offs due to the pandemic," Unite Here representative Ty Hudson said during Monday's meeting. "As we all see light at the end of the tunnel with the vaccine rolling out, there's still a lot of people out there who don't know if they can go back to normal and back to their pre-pandemic jobs."

One in 10 Sonoma County residents find work in the county's tourism and hospitality industry, which collectively laid off nearly one-third of its workforce at the height of the pandemic. In February, the \$2.3 billion economic sector still employed 10,000 fewer workers than it did at the same time last year.

The local protections, which took effect upon adoption Monday night, apply to employees who had been working in the industry for more than six months and were laid off after Jan. 31, 2020. Hotels are now required to offer new positions to qualified former employees first. Petaluma hotels must now provide 10 days for employees to reclaim their jobs, compared to the five days required by state law, and the local ordinance also gives workers the option to seek any open positions for which they are qualified.

A group of more than a dozen residents, activists and local hotel workers, including representatives from North Bay Jobs with Justice, North Bay Labor Council and the North Bay Organizing Project, voiced their support during Monday's virtual council meeting.

But there was some pushback from industry officials, who said they are wary of the local law's potential impact.

**Michael Trillo, General Manager of the Petaluma Sheraton Hotel, submitted a letter challenging the ordinance, as did Kirk Lok, the owner of the Quality Inn Petaluma and president of the Petaluma Lodging Association.**

“A concern is that the ordinance is limited in scope to the hotel industry and doesn’t seem to cover all Petaluma business, and just curious as to why the hotel industry is being singled out?” Trillo said at the meeting. Maddy Hirshfield, political director with the North Bay Labor Council, said the protections are needed for hotel workers due to the massive lay-offs that ravaged the entire industry.

“No one has been hit that hard,” she said. “These are low-paying jobs, often people of color, so that’s why it’s targeted to this group.”

The new California protections applying to a broader range of hospitality sectors will remain in place until 2024, while Petaluma’s hotel worker protections are in place indefinitely or until they are repealed by the City Council.

City leaders said Monday a worker retention ordinance will be addressed separately at the May 3 council meeting.

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