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Minnesota front-line workers could see \$750 hero checks within 12 weeks

State officials on Monday, May 2, rolled out a timeline for the payments and said business owners could see credits for tax overpayments credited to them within 10 days.

Lawmakers approved and the governor signed into law a \$3.4 billion approving the payments last week.



Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz on Monday, May 2, 2022, speaks at a news conference at the Capitol before ceremonially signing into law a compromise unemployment insurance and worker pay bill.

Dana Ferguson / Forum News Service

By [Dana Ferguson](#)

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ST. PAUL — Front-line workers who remained on the job in person during the pandemic can expect to see hero checks arrive in their mailboxes in about 10 to 12 weeks, Minnesota leaders said Monday, May 2.

The timeline comes days after lawmakers sped through a compromise deal last week that set up \$500 million aimed at getting one-time payments to those workers and \$2.7 billion to repay the federal government and replenish the state's unemployment insurance trust fund.

Gov. Tim Walz signed the bill into law late Friday, April 29, ahead of an April 30 deadline for business owners to pay their first quarter taxes. And on Monday morning, Walz ceremonially signed a copy of the bill into law surrounded by legislative leaders, commissioners, front-line workers and business owners at the Capitol.

“Minnesotans see a win-win-win and that’s what they expect of us,” Walz said. “This is a positive. I’m really grateful to the legislators who worked on this and all the folks who kept the faith. It does bode well, this is how it’s supposed to work.”

Under the proposal, roughly 667,000 front-line workers could stand to see \$750 bonus checks. Eligible employees would include health care workers, teachers, meatpackers, corrections officers, first responders, grocery store workers and several others who remained on the job in person amid the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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To be eligible, they would have had to work 120 hours between March 15, 2020, and June 30, 2021, and not have drawn down unemployment benefits for more than 20 weeks. There would also be an income cap of \$85,000 for individual filers who did not work directly with COVID-19 patients to be eligible. Those who worked with COVID-19 patients could receive the checks if they make \$175,000 or less a year.

The state would require workers to apply and offer proof of their hours worked. Department of Labor and Industry Commissioner Roslyn Robertson said the agency was working with a vendor to build out the application software and expected the portal would open within three to four

weeks. In the meantime, she urged workers to sign up for news about the process at frontlinepay.mn.gov.

“We will be moving as quickly as we can to ensure that No. 1 we are doing the outreach to make employees aware that they can apply, I strongly encourage all interested parties to apply for the website update,” she said.

Minnesota Nurses Association President Mary Turner on Monday, May 2, 2022, speaks to reporters during a news conference on a \$3.4 billion law that would send checks out to front-line workers.

Dana Ferguson / Forum News Service

Front-line workers celebrated the bill's approval last week and again on Monday morning during the bill signing ceremony. Labor unions and other worker groups spent more than a year urging lawmakers to pass a plan to issue bonus checks to those who stayed on the job during the height of the pandemic.

“I keep pinching myself that we actually did it and how grateful I am to both the House and the Senate,” Minnesota Nurses Association President Mary Turner said. “The check for \$750, it might not seem like a lot but ... that equals a month’s rent, that equals groceries, that’s money that can go back into their savings accounts.”

While several advocacy groups welcomed the hero checks, some said those funds alone wouldn't do enough to keep workers in long-term care facilities or caring for Minnesotans with disabilities. And they urged lawmakers to include additional funding in their upcoming budget bills to raise rates for people working in those industries.

"Those one-time bonuses do help you retain the staff that you need. But it really comes back down to paying a livable wage and benefits that are close to other employers' so that you have a fair shot of attracting those qualified employees to support people," said Julie Johnson, president of the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation. The organization has urged legislators to invest in salary rate increases for those who work to support people with disabilities.

House Speaker Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park, on Monday said that additional recruitment and retention bonuses, along with possible pay rate increases, likely would come up in supplemental budget bills that are still being worked out between the DFL-led House and GOP-controlled Senate.

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“You’ll see in the various budget bills a lot of effort towards making sure that we provide tools for employers to attract and retain the workforce that we need,” Hortman said. “We know there’s especially a need in nursing, long-term care and law enforcement.”

Department of Employment and Economic Development leaders on Monday said they'd spend roughly seven to 10 days reassessing Minnesota business owners' payroll taxes and planned to issue credits for overpayments after that period. Employers around the state had to pay higher payroll taxes because the state's jobless fund dropped to near-empty after extensive use during the pandemic.

"We're ready, we're excited and this is a big day for Minnesota," DEED Commissioner Steve Grove said. Grove for months urged lawmakers to refill the state's jobless fund to avoid the tax hike to and to keep benefits available for Minnesotans out of work.

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