

RESOLUTION 26: SUPPORTING AFFORDABLE GROCERIES AND GOOD JOBS

Affordability for basic life necessities like food is a top concern for working families. Grocery prices are already high due to inflation, tariffs, and global conflicts. And now, with new technology that allows grocery stores to manipulate food prices, families are going to be paying even more to put food on the table.

Electronic shelf labels (ESLs) are large grocery retailers' newest weapon to exploit consumers, while increasing their bottom line. ESLs allow food prices to be changed remotely and in real time, making it easier to raise prices quickly when demand is high. They also open the door to discrimination based on characteristics like race, gender, age, and geography.

Surveillance pricing—the practice of charging customers different prices for the same product based on data about their personal characteristics and behavior—is already widespread online and in grocery delivery apps. ESLs will allow retailers to deploy these predatory pricing practices in brick-and-mortar stores. Retailers even have the ability to track individual customers as they walk down an aisle using cameras and facial recognition.

Skilled grocery store workers spend a significant amount of time changing price labels on store shelves. With ESLs, prices can be changed automatically or with a keystroke from corporate headquarters. The widespread adoption of ESLs and surveillance pricing will result in lost hours and wages for workers, and angry customers who are rightfully frustrated and confused by changing prices.

The largest grocery retailers in the country have started rolling out ESLs in thousands of stores and announced plans to expand nationwide. Companies want to beat lawmakers to the punch and implement this technology before regulations can be put in place. New patents indicate they are already looking at loopholes in future laws that would focus only on one part of the problem, such as prohibiting AI or algorithms from setting prices. And surveillance pricing can be hard to identify and hard to prove, making it difficult to hold companies accountable. To stop these practices altogether, lawmakers must address ESLs.

Therefore, to protect workers and the privacy and cost of goods for consumers, the AFL-CIO resolves to support efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to ban ESLs, including supporting the Stop Price Gouging in Grocery Stores Act.

[SUBMITTED BY UFCW]