

Opening Statement to Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Bill C-226, An Act to establish a national framework to improve food price transparency

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to appear today on behalf of the Retail Council of Canada.

We represent over 65,000 storefronts from coast to coast to coast, employing more than 2.3 million people and contributing over \$80 billion annually to Canada's GDP.

Every single day, millions of Canadians walk through our members' doors looking for value, quality, and fair prices. Retailers see firsthand the strain households are under right now.

That is why enhancing affordability is not just a talking point for our sector; it is a central priority for grocers across the country. We want our customers to leave the store feeling confident in what they spent, which is why we fundamentally share the goal of helping shoppers make clear, informed choices.

To that end, the Retail Council of Canada acknowledges and supports Prime Minister Carney's commitment to establish a national approach to unit price labelling as part of the National Food Security Strategy. It is the right objective, and it aligns with where most in our industry are already heading.

When you walk down the perimeter of almost any grocery store in Canada today, you are already seeing unit pricing in action. It has been the standard for decades at the butcher counter, the deli, and the produce bins. Head down the centre aisles and look at the packaged goods, and you will see that most major grocers have voluntarily rolled out unit pricing on shelf tags as well.

Retailers did this because it is good customer service, and consumers find it genuinely helpful.

That is why we support the underlying intent of Bill C-226. But good intentions in Ottawa can easily turn into headaches and higher costs at the checkout counter if the legislation is divorced from the reality on the ground.

First, we have to respect jurisdiction. Retail store operations and consumer protection fall under provincial authority. Right now, Quebec is the only province with mandatory unit pricing legislation on the books. If the federal government steps in to build a national framework, it must work hand in glove with provincial partners to harmonise standards.

The worst outcome for retailers and consumers alike would be a patchwork of conflicting rules or overly prescriptive design requirements that force stores to overhaul perfectly good IT systems, digital displays, and shelf tags. Retailers need flexibility and a realistic runway to implement any changes without taking on massive, unnecessary capital expenses.

Second, and most critically, there is a major red flag in this bill that needs to be addressed. Section 3(2)(a)(ii) calls for national standards around reporting price increases, adjustments, and fluctuations.

To what public policy end would this serve?

Just consider the math of a modern grocery store. A typical supermarket carries between 30,000 and 40,000 distinct products. In any given week, regular price movements, promotional cycles, and supplier cost changes affect anywhere from 1,000 to 3,000 individual items. That adds up to more than 100,000 price point adjustments inside a single store every year.

Moreover, the price of any single product on that shelf is the end result of a long, complex journey. It reflects weather events impacting crop yields, global energy spikes, shipping and rail rates, packaging inputs, exchange rates, and supplier price adjustments. Grocers do not control those upstream disruptions, yet this provision would place the entire burden on the retailer to track, document, and explain over 100,000 fluctuations right on the shelf tag.

In practice, this would simply be impossible to execute. Worse, it creates an enormous administrative burden that does not reduce the cost of a single carton of milk or loaf of bread. In fact, the costs required to comply with such an unworkable mandate would inevitably get absorbed into the grocery bill, hurting the very consumers this bill seeks to protect. For these reasons, we believe that if Bill C-226 moves forward, this section should be removed entirely.

Retailers will always stand behind empowering Canadian shoppers with clear information, but practical reality must anchor good intentions. The voluntary momentum already established across our sector works, and if government proceeds with national standards, our members must be heavily consulted to ensure those rules reflect operational facts on the ground.

But requiring stores to account for 100,000 annual price adjustments on shelf tags is simply impossible—it adds compliance costs without helping family budgets, and we urge the Committee to focus squarely on practical measures that truly support affordability.

Thank you, and I look forward to taking your questions.