



April 9, 2020

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the 2 million members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), many of whom are on the front lines combatting the COVID-19 pandemic—including healthcare workers, public sector workers, home care workers, and everyone who keeps our buildings and airports safe and clean—we call on Congress to continue to address the public health crisis and ensuing economic recession with more swift and robust government action. We are in an economic and public health emergency that requires an unprecedented mobilization of the federal government. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided a down payment to help support our nation in the midst of this emergency. Unfortunately, it is not nearly enough to meet the current challenge of this crisis or the long term disruption and uncertainty that our communities face. Now is the time for us to stand together across racial, occupational, economic and political boundaries to make policy choices that protect all people and help every family in our country thrive.

SEIU demands that you center working people and their families in any policies or legislation Congress further adopts by ensuring the following policies are included:

**1. Frontline worker and community health**

- **Paid Sick/Paid Leave** — Dramatically improve paid sick/paid leave provisions from the FFCRA including removing restrictions on large employers, small employers, opt-out for healthcare workers and emergency responders. In addition, increase the paid leave benefit to at least \$15 an hour for low wage workers & expand allowable reasons for taking leave—and make paid sick and paid leave permanent.
- **Include all Immigrants** — Clarify that diagnosis, testing, treatment, care, and prevention of COVID-19 qualifies as treatment of an emergency condition under Medicaid so that undocumented workers, DACA, TPS, and others get the care they need and states can be maximally reimbursed for the cost. End discrimination in direct cash payments against US citizens and others with lawful status who happen to be in the same household as someone who lacks a Social Security Number.
- **Better coordination and transparency on PPE production and distribution** — Unfortunately the President has so far refused to use his authority to account, produce, and distribute PPE in a coordinated way. As such, Congress should require the Administration to drive coordinated accounting and location of existing equipment, production of new equipment under the DPA, increase DPA funding, set fair prices to prevent price gouging and ensure it is routed to states for distribution with prioritization based on acute need. This process must include input from and be transparent to states, healthcare providers, essential workers, and the public so all actors understand both the volume needed by state and distribution.
- **Fair pay for essential workers** — In addition to requiring the provision of PPE, Congress should set an hourly wage floor of at least \$15.00 for essential workers and “Pandemic Premium Pay” for all workers who must report to work during this time (such as doctors, nurses, corrections officers, social workers, grocery store workers, building cleaners, security officers, letter carriers, transit workers, etc.). Congress must provide all Essential Workers reporting to work at

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- this time with a wage premium equal to at least time and a ½ their regular rate of pay and pay for Essential Workers must equal at least \$15 per hour. To be clear, premium or hazard pay is no replacement for PPE—PPE is a basic right of all essential workers.
- **Improve Access to Affordable Coverage** - We must expand health coverage to the uninsured and protect those who may have lost coverage as a result of job loss, whether through Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act. This means creating special enrollment periods for ACA coverage. Congress must help those who have private insurance coverage maintain it by subsidizing COBRA costs and creating a reinsurance program that will prevent premium spikes for those with ACA, employer, or private insurance.
  - **Create a Healthcare Worker Relief Fund** - Include specific funding, either independently or as part of additional money to support healthcare providers, to support health care workers with emergency needs like family care, temporary housing, and other costs that enable them to stay on the job and perform their jobs safely.
  - **Child care** — While the CARES Act provided additional child care funding that states can use for the childcare needs of essential workers, more must be done. Child care providers are risking their own health to provide care for the children of essential workers even as they struggle to keep their doors open. At the same time, essential workers still on the job during this crisis cannot locate safe and affordable childcare. A much larger and urgent infusion of funds is needed to preserve our child care system through this crisis and beyond.
  - **Supporting Nursing Homes and Preventing Hotspots** — To address the crisis at nursing homes, Congress should increase Medicare payments for COVID-19 diagnosis and further increase funding for survey and certification activities. Nursing homes should receive extra money for purchase of PPE and be required to provide it to workers. Lastly, funding provided to nursing homes must be conditioned on putting in place a process, that includes workers, to address labor-management issues like staffing and training.
  - **Treatment of persons in custody including immigration detention settings and prison.** The federal government should empty immigration detention centers and provide resources to address COVID-19 in state and local correctional facilities. These are confined environments where social distancing and the other COVID-19 protocols are nearly impossible to follow. All state and local correctional facilities should develop a COVID-19 plan with involvement of frontline corrections officers that includes education, staffing, screening and testing, treatment, and additional precautions for staff and vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and those with compromised immune systems.
  - **Center race in monitoring and tracking of COVID-19** — The federal government must mandate states maintain and publish statistics on COVID-19 cases by race—places where this is already being done reflects a disproportionate number of African Americans were infected—with the goal of developing interventions to ensure that massive resources are directed to higher impacted and under-served communities.

## 2. **Massive Support States and Local Governments**

- **Direct support to States and Local governments** — With most of the nation's population under lockdown, state and local governments may see their steepest revenue decline ever. This will have far-reaching implications for our communities and for public servants on the front lines delivering essential services like unemployment and food assistance to families that suddenly find themselves out of work with limited resources. We urge additional funding for states and localities of **at least \$500 billion** which expressly calls for a sharing of funds with all local governments and requires assurances that funds shall be used for maintenance of existing personnel. Additionally, restrictions limiting the use of the \$150 billion in the CARES Act to coronavirus-related expenditures should be removed and there should be additional funding for the CARES Act education stabilization fund. Investment in training and new technology is urgently needed to update our public services infrastructure and equip our public servants to deliver essential services in this crisis and beyond. Lastly to ensure

state and local governments have the financial confidence and support they need in this time of crisis, we urge the Federal Reserve to continue to purchase state/local government debt.

- **Increase Medicaid Resources** — Congress should provide, at minimum, a 6 percentage point increase in FMAP on top of the 6.2 percentage point increase previously provided and should add language ensuring that states can receive the increased FMAP until unemployment rates return to a normal level. Also, Congress should consider additional funding on top of the across-the-board FMAP increase, for Medicaid home and community-based services. This must be conditioned on supporting the workforce including worker protections, pay and paid sick/leave as well as maintaining consumers access to services. Lastly, Congress should create a 100 percent FMAP match for the expansion population.
- **Provide Local & State Employers with the Same Support Provided to Private Industry** — The federal government should reimburse public employers for paid sick/paid leave provided to their workforce. In addition, the federal government should provide public employers with funding to support hazard or premium pay for essential public workers.
- **Protecting Democracy During Pandemic** — Provide at least \$4 billion in additional election funding and resources through the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to states and localities to support accessible voting methods during the COVID-19 crisis including vote by mail, safer in person voting, online registration. In addition, any matching requirements for federal support should be waived for states for past and future funding.

### 3. **Worker Centered Economic Relief**

- **Keep people on payroll** — the federal government should invest in providing direct support to employers, including state and local governments, to maintain pre-crisis employment levels allowing workers to maintain their pay, health insurance, contribute to Social Security, and limit economic disruption.
- **Provide further investment in Unemployment Insurance (UI)** — Given the unprecedented increase in UI claims at the state level, states need additional funding to ensure that they are able to invest in the technology and staff needed to process and pay out claims. Congress should also provide funding to states to permanently expand UI benefits to cover non-traditional workers like gig workers, adjuncts and school workers.
- **Increase SNAP and WIC** — Boost funding for these critical programs that help vulnerable people meet their nutritional needs and address barriers to accessing these programs.
- **Nationwide moratorium** on foreclosures and evictions, power and water shutoffs, student debt, federal government repays lenders capital only (no interest).
- **Expand Social security** — lift cap on earnings for contributions, switch CPI measurement to more accurately reflect COLA.
- **Direct cash payments** — Guaranteeing immediate, targeted monthly payments of up to \$2,000 for each adult, and up to an additional \$1,000 for families with children for up to 6 months, with an opportunity to extend another 6 months as needed, with eligibility based upon income.

### 4. **Building Worker Power into COVID Response**

- **Industry Wage Boards or Sectoral Bargaining Structure** — Essential workers, and their unions must be at the table developing responses to coronavirus. A tripartite authority of government-employer-workers should be convened to set safety, compensation and other minimum job standards, with opportunities for stakeholder input and public hearings. In addition, for any industry receiving federal funds during a crisis, there should be a requirement for an advisory board with worker representation or a sectoral bargaining structure that ensures transparency, protecting workers jobs, and creates an industry-wide wage board to determine pay scales, conditions, and workplace standards.
- **Requirements for Relief** — for any industry or company receiving federal funds during a crisis, there should be commitments for:

- A requirement to pay workers on payroll at least \$15 an hour or provide a premium over their regular rate of pay if the worker already earns \$15 or more.
- A process that brings together its workforce, unions representing its workforce and other stakeholders to create a plan for its use of funds including wages, benefits and hours.
- Certification that it will maintain its existing workforce, and maintain hours, provide benefits (leave/ healthcare), pay, protective equipment; and that the recipient will remain neutral in any union organizing effort.
- **Creating good quality jobs that help people get back to work and get the care they need-**  
Congress should begin to invest in industries and programs that allow people to get back to work quickly while addressing serious gaps in our communities. As this pandemic demonstrates, service jobs are the backbone of our economy and we must think seriously about how we invest in these jobs to make them good jobs. Home care is a perfect example. There is a huge need for workers, but the poor quality of these jobs and the inability of individuals in need of care to afford and access it has created a crisis. Investing in long term care and home care will not only help create jobs, but will also address the crisis we face from a rapidly aging America. In order to develop the home care workforce and address the care crisis we recommend
  - New public financing that expands access to services and the paid workforce.
  - Creating a new structure federally or at state level that:
    - Connects providers and consumers
    - Channels payments and benefits to providers
    - Ensures that workers receive appropriate training, in conjunction with groups such as union training funds
    - Incorporates a public process that includes worker participation for determining provider payment rates and benefit levels, and for addressing workforce development issues on an ongoing basis.

SEIU members across the country are playing their part in the fight against the deadly disease, but Congress and the Administration must do more to step up in the same way to fight for workers, their families, and their communities. This moment poses a historic challenge for our country: a national public health crisis unlike anything we have experienced in the modern era. We need a legislative package to meet the requirements of what is necessary to protect the economic security and health of all families during this crisis. If you have any questions, please contact John Gray, SEIU's Legislative Director, at [john.gray@seiu.org](mailto:john.gray@seiu.org) or (202)-412-9232.

Sincerely,

  
Mary Kay Henry  
International President

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cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives  
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate  
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Minority Leader of the U.S. Senate