



# COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

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## **Speaker Pelosi's HEROES Act Responds to Our National Emergency**

*Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director, Coalition on Human Needs, issued the following statement Wednesday, May 13, in response to the latest round of COVID-19 relief legislation:*

“When four in ten families with children do not have enough money to buy a month of food, that is an emergency. When 33 million workers have filed unemployment claims, and many more have not even been able to get through to states’ overwhelmed systems, the need for action is urgent. Speaker Nancy Pelosi has worked with House members to introduce legislation aimed at preventing the pandemic from triggering a full-blown Depression. The scope of their response is needed. Congress must act.

“We are on a precipice now. Millions of us are suffering very real hardships. If the federal government does not take aggressive action now, we will turn a crisis into a long-term disaster. Evictions and foreclosures, if not stopped, will start forcing families out of their homes. Progress in containing the virus will be reversed. Our children’s education will suffer. Businesses will close and families’ economic security will take years to recover.

“The HEROES Act takes needed steps to help families afford food and rent. It recognizes that states and localities will not be able to provide essential services without plugging the yawning gap in revenues caused by the pandemic shutdown. It addresses what Americans are going through now by improving and extending unemployment benefits, paid leave, and cash aid. It provides more funding for Medicaid, requires expanded enrollment through the Healthcare.gov insurance marketplace, and gives states more resources to cover COVID-19 medical care without requiring patients in crisis to share in the costs. It also protects workers by telling OSHA to require workplaces to put in place adequate safety measures.

“We will only get through this if all of us can get the help we need. The HEROES Act takes steps to help immigrants, left out of previous bills. Their essential work is protecting all of us; the bill recognizes this by providing temporary legal status and allowing those using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers to pay their taxes to receive Recovery Rebates. The bill also provides assistance to Puerto Rico and other territories as well as to tribes, and increases funding for the District of Columbia. It helps youth aging out of foster care, and takes steps to protect people in prisons and jails from COVID-19. These

steps will at least start to address the tremendous hardships now afflicting the poorest among us, so unjustly hitting communities of color.

“The bill shores up some essential building blocks to support economic recovery. It provides some funding for child care, although probably not enough. People will not be able to return to work without child care and a functioning education system. Its funding for rental assistance will help families avoid the crushing blow of homelessness. Support for access to broadband and lifeline internet and phone service is simply a necessity, required for our children’s education and everyone’s safety. It sustains the U.S. Postal Service, another necessary part of our economy. A comprehensive approach to preventing dire poverty is provided by increasing SNAP and child nutrition programs, following the Recovery Rebates with important improvements in the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, strengthening Medicaid, enabling people to pay their water and heating bills, and preventing student loan and other debt. By helping people to afford the necessities, their spending will itself be a building block for restoring our economy, as will continued support for employers who keep workers on the payroll.

“It would have been better if the HEROES bill tied the duration of its help to improving economic conditions, and we hope such an approach will eventually be adopted. But this legislation needs to move forward. Delay would be reckless.”

*The Coalition on Human Needs is an alliance of national organizations working together to promote public policies which address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations. For more information please visit [www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org).*