

**NATIONAL GROUP LETTER SEEKING PANDEMIC RELIEF
FOR EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO OUR HEALTH AND ECONOMIC CRISIS**

July 28, 2020

Dear Senator/Representative:

The undersigned 86 national organizations urge you to enact new pandemic relief legislation that can effectively reduce the harsh scope of the health and economic crisis engulfing our nation. We have exceeded four million cases of COVID-19, and more than 144,000 deaths. Time is short and the need is urgent. The \$600 per week in Pandemic Unemployment Compensation has expired for more than 25 million workers. If that terrible failure is not reversed, an estimated 5 million jobs will be lost. As COVID19 cases and deaths spike, unemployment claims are again rising. Half of all households have lost income from work since March 13. The federal moratorium on evictions is also ending; more than one-quarter of households that lost work income were unable to pay last month's rent. Of households with less than \$25,000 in income, more than one-third said they did not have enough to eat during the previous week. These threats to life and economic security are disproportionately felt by people of color. Thirty percent of Black households could not pay their previous month's rent, more than twice the white rate. Fully 62 percent of Latinx households have lost work income since mid-March. The age-adjusted death rates from the coronavirus for Black and Indigenous Americans are more than three times that of whites.

We have not seen this kind of hardship since the Great Depression, and your duty requires an additional multi-trillion-dollar response, similar to the House-passed HEROES bill, to prevent depression conditions from overtaking us. We have seen conclusively that states cannot just re-open and expect a good economy to be restored. Congress must approve (1) cash and other assistance to prevent devastating and long-term losses to the jobless and families; (2) protections and resources to create conditions for a safe return to work; (3) state and local aid to ensure adequate health care, education, and many other essential services; and (4) Congress must protect mainstays of our democracy from being undermined by the pandemic: safe voting; the U.S. Postal Service; and the decennial Census.

Further, because a massive response is required to alleviate the crisis we are in, it is essential that Congress reject tax breaks that benefit high-income individuals and businesses without creating economic growth. For example, doubling the tax deduction for business meals or entertainment will not help if restaurants must close or if people feel unsafe in them. Congress should repeal the business tax break in the CARES Act that gives 43,000 millionaires an average tax cut of \$1.6 million each. This change, included in the House's HEROES Act, would save \$250 billion that should be put toward the far more effective investments in economic recovery listed below.

1) Unemployment and other income assistance: While the economy is crippled by the pandemic, it is vital that Congress continues the economic life support of income assistance. During economic downturns, programs like unemployment insurance and SNAP have been shown to boost the economy more than other approaches because they provide buying power to low-income people. With unemployment claims rising by 2.3 million (counting state UI plus the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance that covers a broader swath of workers), it is a grim failure that the Senate's inaction will cause the \$600/week Pandemic Unemployment Compensation to run out after July 25 or 26. Congress should act quickly to reinstate this benefit until unemployment dramatically declines. Continuing these

benefits will pump \$15.4 billion a week into the economy, badly needed now. Congress should also provide Economic Impact payments of \$1,200 per adult or child family member, make those payments available to families that include non-citizens, and distribute them via benefits programs such as SNAP or SSI if people cannot receive them through direct bank deposits. Because low-income people take the longest to recover from economic downturns, Congress should improve upon the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), with benefits to be received in 2021. The Child Tax Credit should be made fully refundable, increased to \$3,000 per child (or \$3,600 for children under 6), and extended to cover 17-year-olds. The EITC should be available to individuals aged 19-66 with no qualifying children, with the maximum benefit for these individuals increased to \$1,487.

Preventing Hunger, Homelessness, and Contagion: If the federal moratorium on evictions is allowed to expire on July 24, along with expiring local and state moratoria, the nation could face at least 20 million evictions. Right now, about one-quarter of households with children did not pay last month's rent; about one-third of households with children with less than \$25,000 in income did not have enough to eat in the previous week. The consequences of such hardships are simply unacceptable: they will affect family stability and children's health, education, and likelihood of future poverty. Congress must provide \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance and extend moratoria on evictions and foreclosures. Congress should also include \$11.5 billion for Emergency Solutions Grants to mitigate homelessness, including ways to divert people from unsafe homeless shelters or the streets. You must also increase the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent and increase the minimum benefit to \$30 per month, with increased funding also going to U.S. territories and tribes; increase child nutrition programs; and increase nutrition programs such as meals on wheels for older Americans. Congress should also include in the package a \$10 billion emergency fund that states could direct to the poorest families for assistance to prevent eviction or utility shut-offs, provide for basic needs, or to create a subsidized jobs program.

Congress must recognize that all residential facilities are more likely to be contagion hot spots, including nursing homes, homeless shelters, juvenile detention centers, prisons, jails, and immigrant detention centers, and that funding must be adequate to divert people from these facilities to the maximum extent possible and to protect residents and staff from disease.

2) Protections and Resources for a Safe Return to Work: As we have seen, simply re-opening businesses and schools without protecting people from COVID-19 is not sustainable. We support adequate funding for testing, contact tracing, personal protective equipment, and medical care and research. This includes provision of medical and protective equipment to first responders and essential workers; no cost-sharing for medical treatment for COVID-19 in Medicaid, Medicare, and veterans' health programs; and assuring that COVID-19 treatment is provided for territories and tribes (including increased funding for the Indian Health Service). Because Medicaid is an essential part of medical treatment for the coronavirus, Congress must increase the federal share for Medicaid (FMAP) by 14 percentage points, and should increase federal payments for Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) by an additional 10 percentage points. Congress should recognize the increased need for children's mental health services and to protect women and families from domestic violence as part of the consequences of the pandemic, including protections for immigrants fleeing from domestic violence.

It is inevitable and desirable that Medicaid and Medicare provide more care to more people in a pandemic. We oppose efforts to insert in a relief package decision-making structures intended to result in fast-tracked cuts to these programs.

Congress must both protect workers when it is not safe to work through paid sick leave and family and medical leave programs, extending coverage to businesses with over 500 employees or with fewer than 50 employees and to government employees. Paid leave should be available to care for an adult family member, or when quarantining is necessary, and provide increased wage replacement. Right now, 30 percent of those who are sick with COVID-19 symptoms report not having had enough to eat in the previous week. Paid leave would alleviate such unacceptable hardship. When parents can return to work safely, they need child care, but child care providers are increasingly unable to stay in business. We support \$50 billion to sustain child care provision and to enable child care providers to afford the safety procedures required to prevent the spread of COVID19.

We oppose the sweeping immunity from liability claims that has been proposed for businesses, nursing homes, and other facilities. Despite only a handful of lawsuits brought nationwide, and many protections for employers already in place, the proposal would make it nearly impossible to sue for unsafe conditions. We urge Congress to require OSHA to issue emergency safety standards as the best protection for both workers and businesses.

3) State and Local Aid to Ensure Adequate Health Care, Education, and Other Essential Services: In addition to the increased federal share for Medicaid noted above, states and localities urgently need \$1 trillion in federal assistance to cope with plummeting revenues. State government shortfalls are estimated at \$555 billion through FY 2022; that does not count local government losses. State and local governments have already laid off 1.5 million workers. The reported Senate Republican plan of providing \$105 billion for education and no additional support for the rest of state and local government is wholly inadequate. About \$70 billion of the aid is said to be for K-12; of that, \$30 billion is contingent on schools physically reopening. School districts should be provided funds to create the best possible education for their students that can be carried out safely. Infectious disease experts do not believe that schools can open safely in communities experiencing surging COVID cases, and to condition aid on their reopening simply means far less money will be available to schools that responsibly refuse to place their students, staff and communities at risk. We are extremely concerned about low-income children falling behind academically because of the pandemic, but this means Congress must provide adequate funding so schools can find ways to reach out effectively to their students in a manner that does not jeopardize health. Congress should increase funding for post-secondary/higher education, with special attention to meeting the needs of low-income students, including loan forgiveness, extensions for the use of work-study, and increased funding for youth aging out of foster care who participate in the Chafee Foster Care Independence program. States lost \$6 billion, or 21 percent, of their sales tax revenues in May alone, with states such as Florida, California, New York, North Dakota and Connecticut seeing their sales tax revenue plummet by more than 30 percent. Many states are starting to make counterproductive cuts in education; health care services including substance abuse/opioid treatment and services for people with disabilities; housing; public transportation; and family violence services. It is not enough simply to allow states to use the \$150 billion already provided to make up some of their revenue losses in addition to its use for meeting pandemic needs. Without \$1 trillion in state/local aid plus increased Medicaid support, states and localities will be forced to make cuts that will undermine

your efforts to provide for education and health care, and to deliver services and benefits ranging from transportation to UI to public safety.

4) Protecting Mainstays of our Democracy: Congress must provide at least \$3.6 billion to protect safe voting, by providing states with the resources needed to expand access to voting by mail while allowing safe in-person voting for those who need it. We urge you to protect the U.S. Postal Service by providing \$25 billion to offset lost revenues or increased costs due to the pandemic, and to approve a four month extension of the decennial Census despite reports that the Trump Administration may no longer wish to extend Census operations. COVID-19 has forced the delay in seeking in-person Census responses from those who have not responded on their own. If there is no extension of activities, there will be an inaccurate Census, with communities of color, immigrants, and young children significantly undercounted. The Trump Administration has announced its intention to exclude undocumented immigrants from the congressional apportionment base. This is patently unconstitutional, and Congress must prohibit such activity while approving the extension of deadlines for reporting apportionment and redistricting data.

The nation is in crisis. The Senate's failure to act so far is placing millions of Americans at risk of sickness, hunger, and homelessness. Too many lives have been lost. We need Congress to enact COVID-19 relief now, of sufficient scope to include the essential items described above.

With sincere wishes for swift success in addressing these urgent needs,

ACCESS

African American Health Alliance

American Association of People with Disabilities

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Center for Disability Rights

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Center for Public Representation

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Advocacy Institute

Children's Aid

Children's Defense Fund

Children's HealthWatch

Coalition for Food Security Puerto Rico

Coalition on Human Needs

Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Community Change Action
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Criminalization of Poverty Project at Institute for Policy Studies
Disability Rights Vermont
Faith in Public Life
Family Equality
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
FPWA
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Churches
Human Rights Campaign
Hunger Free America
Justice in Aging
Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor & the Working Poor, Georgetown University
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Leadership Team of the Felician Sisters of North America
League of Women Voters of the United States
LGBTQ Allyship
Maternal and Child Health Access
Meals on Wheels America
MomsRising
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition
National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients
National Council of Jewish Women

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Domestic Violence Hotline
National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Human Services Assembly
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
National Urban League
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
National Working Positive Coalition
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
New Progressive Alliance
PFLAG National
Poligon Education Fund
Prison Policy Initiative
Provincial Council Clerics of St. Viator (Viatorians)
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Public Citizen
Returning Citizens United
Save Our Homes
Sisters of Charity Federation
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership
Sisters of Charity, BVM

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team

Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York

SocioEnergetics Foundation

Tax March

The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

Union for Reform Judaism

We All Rise

West Valley Neighborhoods Coalition

WHEAT (World Hunger Education, Advocacy & Training)

Workers' Rights Institute at Georgetown Law Center

Workplace Fairness

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