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### **Why Florida Urgently Needs More Federal Help to Protect its People from the Impact of COVID-19**

Florida's COVID-19 cases have spiked sharply in recent weeks, nearly [433,000](#) as of July 27 (2,015 per 100,000), with 5,930 deaths. The impact on Florida's people and the state's economy is severe. About half of Florida's households (49.8% percent) included someone who [lost employment income](#) between March 13 and July 7. Unprecedented numbers of people have been unable to purchase enough food or pay their rent. The blow to Florida's economy is reflected in plummeting [state revenues](#), with a decline of more than 30% in state sales tax revenue in May 2020 as compared to May 2019, well above the 21% national average reduction. These sales taxes make up more than 60% of Florida's tax revenues. This does not take into account reduced revenues hitting Florida's local governments.

Without additional federal aid, Florida will not be able to provide the services needed to help its people recover and move forward. Lay-offs of local and state workers are already starting to occur, with 18,100 fewer [government jobs](#) in Florida in June 2020 than in June 2019. Education for children in Florida, already adversely affected by school closings, will suffer from teacher lay-offs. Further, the combined [education and health category](#) (which includes higher education) lost 41,500 jobs in Florida from June 2019 to June 2020.

Many sectors of Florida's economy have suffered. [Leisure and hospitality jobs](#) dropped from 1,250,700 to 982,300 over the past year (June 2019 to June 2020), a 21 percent drop. Florida's stay-at-home order expired on May 4, and Governor DeSantis [opened businesses](#) over May and June. With a surging caseload, he closed bars again on June 26, while leaving most businesses open. However, with the [7-day average for COVID-19](#) cases per day rising from 2,892 on June 20 to 11,137 on July 20, fear of infection will keep some customers home whether officials allow businesses to reopen or not. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has predicted national unemployment exceeding 9 percent at the end of this year. Without continued federal assistance similar to provisions in the HEROES Act as passed by the House, Florida will be hard-pressed to provide needed unemployment benefits. [Unemployment](#) was 10.4 percent in June, stunningly higher than the June 2019 level of 3.2 percent. Without additional cash payments to individuals and families, people who have lost income from work will find it more and more difficult to pay for necessities, causing supermarkets and other retail stores to lose income and the economic downward spiral to continue.

Overall, for the week ending July 18, Florida saw an increase of [65,890 unemployment insurance claims](#); the highest jump of any state. If the current \$600/week Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program were to expire, it would cost the state [244,921 jobs](#).

**Poverty, Hunger, and Racial Disparities.** The coronavirus pandemic has laid bare racial disparities that Florida and the nation must address. Before the pandemic, [12 percent](#) of Florida's non-Hispanic white children lived below the federal poverty level, while 24 percent of Florida's Hispanic/Latinx children and 31 percent of Florida's Black children were poor. Children growing up in poverty are likely to experience worse health, education and adult earnings outcomes. The pandemic is making the hardships associated with poverty far worse, with glaring disparities along racial/ethnic lines. For example, in Florida, nearly four times as many Black as white households with children reported that in the previous 7 days, they [sometimes or often did not have enough to eat](#) (32 percent versus 8.2 percent, respectively). Nearly 17 percent of Latinx households with children sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the past 7 days. When someone in a Florida household left work in order to care for children not in school or child care, close to 47 percent said their household did not have enough to eat sometimes or often in the previous week. When household income was below \$25,000 per year, 45 percent reported sometimes or often not having enough to eat in the previous week. In order to reduce these unprecedentedly high proportions of people going without food, Congress must increase the maximum benefit for SNAP by 15 percent and raise the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 per month.

**Threatened Evictions and Homelessness.** Florida could face an unacceptable surge in homelessness as lost income makes it impossible for households to afford rent. More than 18 percent of Florida's households were [not able to pay rent](#) in the previous month, as surveyed during a seven-day period ending July 7. Twenty-nine percent of Black households in Florida missed paying the previous month's rent, as compared to 17 percent of white households and nearly 14 percent of Latinx households. About one-quarter of households with children in Florida had missed the previous month's rent. Previously enacted federal legislation set a moratorium on evictions in rental properties with federal subsidies or backing. Those protections took effect March 27 and will expire in 120 days. Continued high unemployment will make it impossible for people to make up unpaid back rent once the partial moratorium expires. The Senate should agree to provide \$100 billion for emergency rental assistance, as the House did in the HEROES Act, and to broaden and extend the moratorium on evictions. People who are homeless and contract coronavirus are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die than others in the general public, according to the [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#).

**Access to Health Care Varies by Race.** It remains true that rebuilding the economy requires better control over the spread of COVID-19. The timing for development of effective vaccines and more effective treatments is uncertain. But we know that people must have access to testing and medical treatment to limit the impact of the disease. There are too many Floridians without [health insurance](#). Here too, disparities by race are unacceptable. While 9.3 percent of whites in Florida have no health insurance, 14.4 percent of Latinx in Florida and nearly 14 percent of Blacks in Florida are uninsured. This will mean they delay treatment and potentially increase the spread of the coronavirus as they return to work. One important solution for medical care is for the federal government to increase the share it pays states for Medicaid, allowing states to better meet needs for emergency services and all other forms of care, as proposed in the House's HEROES Act. Florida has not expanded its Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act, so cannot readily serve people who may be losing their health insurance through work, but the unanticipated high costs of coping with a pandemic still makes a higher federal Medicaid match (FMAP) extremely important to Florida's recovery.

***Household Income Losses Not Seen Since the Great Depression.*** The fact that close to half of Florida’s households have experienced a loss of income from work underscores the urgency of Florida’s need for help to prevent a long-term deep recession. More than 57 percent of Latinx households in Florida have [experienced earnings losses](#) since March 13, as have 56 percent of Black households, 45 percent of white households, and 48.5 percent of Asian households. Florida needs the continuation of the special pandemic unemployment benefits that will otherwise expire well before the economy recovers. If they are allowed to expire, as of July 27 [nearly 1.2 million Floridians](#) receiving unemployment benefits will start losing \$708.2 million per week, causing great harm to their families and to the economy. Families unable to regain earnings or to work at all must have cash aid similar to the \$1,200 cash payments made earlier this year, modified to allow households with immigrants to receive at least some benefits, with expedited distribution of the aid to people with income too low to owe federal income tax. Failing to allow mixed-status households to receive the \$1,200 cash payments would deny assistance to [228,000 families in Florida](#), a failure the state can ill afford. Improving the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit would also help to sustain families starting next year. Investments in paid leave and child care are also essential to help parents return to work – and no one should be forced to work without the protection of safe working conditions. All these are essential components of what states need to recover from the twin crises of pandemic and severe economic downturn. The Senate must act.