

AFL-CIO

AMERICA'S UNIONS

March 11, 2020

Dear Representative:

In response to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the labor movement is mobilizing to protect our members who are on the front lines combatting the disease and the millions of Americans who may be exposed at work. We urge Congress to do its part by passing emergency legislation at the scale and the urgency that this threat requires.

First, Congress should include the COVID-19 Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2019 (H.R. 6139), which would require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard to ensure health care facilities implement comprehensive infectious disease exposure control plans to keep front line health care workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, workers must not be discouraged by cost considerations from taking the necessary steps to get tested and to stay at home when they are sick. Free testing must be made available and easily accessible to all Americans to ensure we are able to identify those with the virus to keep it from spreading.

Third, workers who are sick, or who are affected by quarantine orders, must receive paid sick leave. The COVID-19 virus has highlighted the inadequacy of our system of paid sick leave, workers' compensation, and unemployment insurance, which must now be modernized and improved to address the crisis.

Congress can begin by passing the emergency sick leave legislation introduced by Rep. Rosa DeLauro and Sen. Patty Murray (H.R. 6150 and S. 3415); this legislation should be included in the package the House votes on this week. It would require employers to provide up to seven paid sick days in normal times, and to provide an additional 14 days of paid sick leave, available immediately, at the beginning of a public health emergency, including the current coronavirus crisis. Similarly, unemployment benefits must be available and adequate for all workers who lose their jobs due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Fourth, Congress should take immediate steps to ensure access to food by expanding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program and the school lunch program, and suspend any federal regulations that weaken food assistance.

Finally, because the COVID-19 outbreak poses a significant risk to the economy, plans should be developed and implemented quickly to prevent and mitigate an increasingly likely economic slowdown. This should include consideration of additional funding assistance to state and local governments by picking up the state share of FMAP, making direct payments to

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815 16th St., N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006 • 202-637-5000 • www.aflcio.org

RICHARD L. TRUMKA
PRESIDENT

ELIZABETH H. SHULER
SECRETARY-TREASURER

TEFERE GEBRE
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

households, and investments in infrastructure. By contrast, a payroll tax cut, as some are suggesting, would not only be too slow and too modest and not benefit laid-off workers, it is also a stealth attack on Social Security, our nation's most important and effective income support program.

Since the virus will not discriminate in who it makes sick, it is critical that our overall response be as inclusive as possible and immigrants should not be scapegoated. This is a public health crisis that demands strong and decisive action. We urge you to act without delay.

Sincerely,



William Samuel, Director
Government Affairs

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