



July 20, 2020

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Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the undersigned organizations, we urge you to take strong, comprehensive action this month to address the health and economic consequences of the once-again growing COVID-19 crisis. As cases and hospitalizations continue to skyrocket in many parts of the country, and as millions of people continue to face economic catastrophe, our nation cannot afford to surrender to the virus or hope that the situation will magically get better. Our nation is starving for true leadership – and now that the House has acted in passing the HEROES Act, the responsibility lies with you to save lives, preserve and strengthen our vital institutions, and to ensure that the eventual economic recovery works for everyone.

While the pandemic has upended everyone's lives, it has not affected everyone equally. The COVID-19 crisis has had a particularly devastating impact on Black and Brown people, Native Americans, low-income people, people with disabilities, the elderly, women, and immigrant communities. To make matters worse, many state policymakers do not appear to be factoring the ongoing disparities into their rushed decisions to reopen their states. Instead, these decisions have only magnified the effects that decades of systemic racism and inequality have had on people of color. For too long, policymakers have deprived the communities we represent of essential resources they need to be healthy and thrive, and so it was predictable that these communities, once again, have been hit the hardest.

Now is not the time for incremental half-measures or trade-offs. The Senate has a moral obligation to ensure that all Americans have the resources they need to withstand this crisis, and to provide additional resources to the people and communities that have borne the brunt of the pandemic's impact. It must do so in a manner that protects the civil and human rights of all people; and because we are all in this together, it must not leave out any community on the basis of factors such as race, color, national origin, immigration status, disability, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), or age. As we face the start of another school year, the Senate must ensure that children and families have the resources and support they need, now and into the future. And as we approach the next elections, the Senate must guarantee that all voters can safely cast their ballots and rest assured that their voices will be heard.

What the Senate must not do is force working people to choose between their health and safety and their livelihood. It must [reject any measure](#) that would allow employers to escape accountability for making decisions that sacrifice their employee's health and well-being in the name of "reopening" the economy, or that would deprive working people of their legal rights when employers disregard policies designed to prevent people from contracting the virus.

To these ends, and before it leaves for August recess, we call on the Senate to enact legislation that achieves the following objectives. Our coalition's task forces have spelled out these priorities in greater detail, with many of them linked below, and we will be following up with you to ensure that they are included.

**Ensuring Equal Access to Quality Health Care:** A virus such as COVID-19 does not discriminate. Yet the pandemic has exposed glaring structural disparities, including in access to preventive, urgent, and long-term health care, resulting in increased vulnerabilities and far worse outcomes for some communities and heightening the threat to everyone. Congress must ensure free and widespread testing, treatment, and eventual vaccination for all people; ensure that disaggregated demographic data on testing, cases, and outcomes is made publicly available; protect the Affordable Care Act and increase access to care; enhance federal Medicaid assistance; and provide additional support for people with disabilities, seniors, and other vulnerable populations. Congress must also provide sufficient funding to ensure materials and services are accessible to Limited English Proficient (LEP) people and produce enough protective medical equipment so that tragic shortages can be held to a minimum.

**Providing More Relief for our Most Marginalized Communities:** As unemployment has skyrocketed, and with so much uncertainty about when and how our economy will recover, the need for strong safety net policies to ensure basic human needs are being met is greater than ever. Congress must provide recurring, direct cash assistance during this severe economic crisis that targets aid to all vulnerable people in our country, including immigrants and formerly incarcerated people; increase access to SNAP relief; expand the EITC and Child Tax Credit; ensure widespread and uninterrupted access to clean water, [internet](#), and other critical services and utilities; protect access to and the safety of public transit systems nationwide.

**Protecting the Most Vulnerable Working People:** It is a sad reality that many of our most vital working people – those who still leave home daily and risk their lives to deliver our care, our food, our mail, and other essentials – are faced with inadequate protections to their health and economic well-being. Meanwhile, countless low-income employees who have been sidelined are also highly vulnerable to illness or financial insecurity. Congress must ensure that all workers have access to paid sick leave, enhanced unemployment assistance, child care, and fair pay. Congress must also create enforceable workplace safety standards that preserve access to justice and protect working people as well as those whom they serve.

**Safeguarding Homes and Financial Health, and Providing Shelter to Those Most in Need:** The CARES Act took important first steps in reducing homelessness, evictions, and foreclosures. But more resources and policies are needed to protect homeless people. Congress should also improve the complicated and confusing patchwork of federal, state, and private protections against evictions and foreclosures, and protect the financial security of families from abusive small-dollar lending, debt collection, and credit reporting practices. Congress must also ensure that PPP loans are working for businesses in all communities and are meeting fair lending obligations.

### **Reducing Law Enforcement Responses and the Risks to Incarcerated People and Corrections**

**Employees:** Jails, prisons, and immigrant detention centers face a public health catastrophe due to overcrowded and unsafe conditions, particularly for those who are older or have existing health problems. Meanwhile, law enforcement has targeted people of color as they have enforced stay-at-home orders and requirements to wear masks. Congress must a) support the immediate release of as many people as possible from [jails](#), [prisons](#), and immigrant detention centers; b) increase testing and provide adequate health care and low-cost [communications](#) for all people who remain in custody; c) incentivize law enforcement to reduce arrests and end jail bookings; d) ensure that federal funding to law enforcement agencies prioritizes [public education and awareness](#) of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, limits arrests and citations for failure to comply with public health ordinances, and requires the implementation of bias and anti-profiling policies and trainings; e) invest in mental health, community outreach, and social services to end the use of police in addressing public health crises; and f) remove barriers to people with records accessing social safety net programs and services upon release.

**Combating Sharp Increase in Hate Crimes:** Racist and xenophobic rhetoric from leaders and a sharp increase in acts of hate have accompanied the spread of the coronavirus. Asian Americans, immigrants, and communities of color are now confronting a terrifying rise in hate crimes, and we are also seeing an increase in calls for violence against the LGBTQ community, Muslims, Jews, and people with disabilities. To improve the response to hate incidents and hate crimes, Congress must pass the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act to improve the data collection and law enforcement policies on identifying, investigating, and reporting hate crimes. The Act also helps hate crimes victims receive assistance and support through grants for state hotlines, and creates opportunities to expand the use of restorative practices in hate crimes cases. Finally, it would allow courts to require individuals convicted under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act to participate in educational programs or community service as a condition of supervised release.

### **Minimizing Learning Loss, Ensuring Equal Educational Opportunity, and Protecting Student Loan**

**Borrowers:** Our educational system was deeply inequitable before this crisis, and school closures add to the barriers marginalized students face. While schools are closed, Congress must ensure marginalized students have equitable access to distance learning and school meals, and Congress must provide additional resources so that schools can reopen as soon as it is safe and healthy to do so, with special attention to schools in communities that have long been denied their share of state and local funding. Congress must also take steps to reduce educational disparities, as well as to ensure access to early childhood education, so that when schools reopen those who have been most left behind have an opportunity to catch up. Additionally, especially because of the compounding barriers students of color face, Congress should cancel student loan debt to provide a more equal opportunity.

**Protecting Our Democracy:** In 2020, the fate and future of our democracy hang in the balance. The primary election fiascos in many states, most notably Georgia and Wisconsin – where voters had to wait in hours-long long lines, risking their health in order to exercise their fundamental right to vote – underscored the tremendous need for Congress to provide additional financial assistance to states amidst the worst public health crisis this nation has witnessed in over a century. The CARES Act provided \$400 million to help states prepare for the 2020 elections, but experts have determined that at least \$3.6 billion

in additional funding is needed so states can administer this year's elections in a safe, fair, and accessible manner through the implementation of vote-by-mail and the expansion of early voting and in-person voting options. Unless states offer voters an expanded range of safe voting options, millions of historically disenfranchised citizens will not have equal access to the ballot box, and the promise of our democracy will not be fulfilled.

**Ensuring a Fair and Accurate Census:** To meet its constitutional mandate to count everyone, the Census Bureau must have sufficient time and resources to properly rally the nation to participate in the census, in the face of unprecedented challenges. The administration and Congress agree that extending the 2020 Census due to COVID-19 disruptions is in the best interests of the nation, and necessary to produce a full, fair, and accurate count. The Fair and Accurate Census Act (S.4048) combines the administration's request for statutory relief from reporting deadlines with critical transparency requirements and operational modifications that are important to ensuring a successful 2020 Census. It would replenish \$400 million of the 2020 Census contingency fund, for enhanced operations in light of widespread COVID-19 disruptions to all census operations and the possibility of emergencies during the height of the door-knocking operation. It would also ensure that Census Bureau fiscal and staff resources are focused squarely on completing the most accurate 2020 Census possible in all states and communities in the face of unprecedented COVID-19 related challenges, by prohibiting work on any data products that include topics not tested or included in the 2020 Census.

**Protecting Immigrants and Citizens Alike:** Viruses do not care about visas. Yet the CARES Act shut out many essential workers and their families from key provisions based solely on immigration status. And President Trump is reportedly planning, once again, to try to eliminate DACA protections for nearly 800,000 more immigrants. Congress must a) make stimulus payments or other forms of direct relief available to all people who pay into our federal income tax system, b) ensure truly nondiscriminatory access to testing, treatment, and vaccines; and c) provide automatic extensions of work authorizations for DACA and Temporary Protected Status recipients. Congress must also reject additional DHS funding, given President Trump's history of using such funds to advance wasteful and cruel policy objectives.

Our nation faces tremendous uncertainty due to a public health crisis that we are still struggling to fully understand, but we will ultimately get through this if we pull together and do what is best for everyone. The future is what we must create together. We have to unite across our differences and reimagine what our commitment truly is to one another. It is profoundly important that the eventual recovery works for everyone, and that Congress adopts policies that leave us in a better place. In the coming weeks, we look forward to working with you to that end.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
A. Philip Randolph Institute  
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas  
Alliance for Justice  
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

American Association of People with Disabilities  
American Association of University Women (AAUW)  
American Atheists  
American Humanist Association  
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)  
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)  
Arab American Institute (AAI)  
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC  
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)  
Association of University Centers on Disabilities  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Black Women's Health Imperative  
Campaign for Youth Justice  
Center for Responsible Lending  
Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism - California State University, San Bernardino  
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
Common Cause  
Democracy 21  
Demos  
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)  
Earthjustice  
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund  
Equal Justice Society  
Faith In Public Life  
Feminist Majority Foundation  
Housing Choice Partners  
Human Rights Campaign  
Impact Fund  
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda  
Japanese American Citizens League  
Justice for Migrant Women  
Justice in Aging  
Lambda Legal  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
League of Women Voters of the United States  
Matthew Shepard Foundation  
NAACP  
National Action Network  
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities  
National Association of Human Rights Workers  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Black Justice Coalition

National CAPACD  
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low income clients)  
National Council of Churches  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council on Independent Living  
National Domestic Workers Alliance  
National Education Association  
National Employment Law Project  
National Employment Lawyers Association  
National Fair Housing Alliance  
National Health Law Program  
National Hispanic Media Coalition  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Indian Education Association  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Urban League  
National Organization for Women  
National Women's Law Center  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New Voices for Reproductive Justice  
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates  
People For the American Way  
PFLAG National  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Prison Policy Initiative  
Public Citizen  
Service Employees International Union  
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)  
South Asian Network  
Southern Echo Inc.  
SPARK Reproductive Justice Now!, Inc.  
SPLC Action Fund  
Tash  
The Afiya Center  
The National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)  
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society  
The Workers Circle  
Transportation Learning Center  
UnidosUS  
Union for Reform Judaism  
United Church of Christ, OC Inc.  
United Steelworkers (USW)

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United We Dream  
Voices for Progress  
Workplace Fairness