



# AFL-CIO

AMERICA'S UNIONS

**American Federation  
of Labor and  
Congress of Industrial  
Organizations**

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April 16, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
U.S. Senate

Dear Leaders Pelosi, McConnell, McCarthy and Schumer:

We urge you to prioritize workers and their families and to put them at the front of the line in this time of great need. America's workers—in the private and public sectors—have been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, for too many heroes on the front lines, simply going to work has already proven to be a death sentence in this cruel crisis. Without your leadership and action, working people may not recover.

We supported the efforts to date to stabilize our industries and communities, but unfortunately, much more must be done. These efforts already have been eclipsed by surging unemployment and record job loss. Workers across all sectors are facing a stark reality: This unprecedented crisis will affect each and every one of us. As the pandemic continues, millions are losing their jobs and their health insurance coverage as a result, while coping with devastating health concerns of their own. Workers are experiencing severe cash flow constraints and struggling to meet basic food and shelter needs. We're already seeing the effects of stressed state and local budgets. Many of our members are working without adequate safety protections and access to personal protective equipment and are becoming sick and unable to work, with some losing their lives because of COVID-19.

This is a moment that demands of us compassion and common sense; any meaningful relief and recovery will require a prioritization of the workers and their families who undergird the stability and prosperity of this nation.

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While the recovery actions already taken by Congress will help many, those efforts are disproportionately aimed at large enterprises, not communities and families. We now urge the development of a CARES 2 proposal that meets the needs of working people and their families head on. We simply cannot rely on a “trickle down” approach that is dependent on the actions of private equity and large companies.

Without more direct help, hardworking people and their families will continue spiraling downward to a social safety net in tatters, damaged by years of under-investment. We call on Congress and President Trump to embrace **America’s Five Economic Essentials**, outlined below, as the centerpiece of the CARES 2 package to KEEP our families safe:

**KEEP America healthy—protect and expand health insurance for all workers:** We are in a health care crisis, yet the first thing millions of people are losing is their health insurance. Now, in the midst of a pandemic, is not the time to throw millions of laid-off workers and the families of workers who have died off their health insurance. We need to expand affordable health care, not eliminate it, so that all workers have access to medical testing and treatment. This must include 100% federal payment support for COBRA extensions that otherwise would bankrupt millions and steps to ensure there are no surprise medical bills sent to families in medical crisis. We also must assure the financial solvency of hospitals across the country, including community hospitals that provide the economic engine in many rural communities.

**KEEP front-line workers safe and secure:** All essential workers need safety protections on the job, including personal protective equipment, training, testing, anti-retaliation protections, paid sick leave and hazard pay. We are seeing workers performing essential services or making essential products left unprotected as they protect us in sectors such as health care, grocery, transportation, public service, public and higher education, the U.S. Postal Service, emergency response, construction, manufacturing, energy, utilities, broadcast news and many more. These workers are everyday heroes who have kept our country moving, fed, cared for and safe through this crisis. All these workers need to be treated, protected and paid accordingly. This requires actions, not just words; which is why Congress must mandate that OSHA and MSHA issue emergency temporary standards to protect all workers from infectious diseases, and the administration must use the Defense Production Act to ensure the manufacture of personal protective equipment and other medical supplies we must have to keep our country safe for the duration of this crisis.

**KEEP workers employed and protect earned pension checks:** We are headed toward catastrophic levels of unemployment—20% or higher—and we must act. The Paycheck Protection Program must pay workers as it was designed to do, not used by executives to pay back debts to big banks and private equity firms. CARES 2 must ensure that millions more workers are paid for through the duration of this crisis by making support for employers who keep workers on payroll simpler, faster and more universal. A pension is a promise—workers paid into a system for decades of work for the promise of security in retirement. Congress must help ensure this promise made to millions of private-sector American workers and their families is kept. The labor movement has advanced meaningful proposals on how to address this and these must be adopted. We must also extend direct financial support for all workers' housing, including renters and homeowners.

**KEEP state and local governments, our public schools and the U.S. Postal Service solvent and working:** The past decade of austerity at the state and local levels have exacerbated the current crisis. We are watching state and local governments become overwhelmed by an unprecedented demand for public services at the very moment that revenues are cratering. A substantial investment in unrestricted aid to state and local governments, school districts, colleges and universities, and the U.S. Postal Service, as well as greater federal assistance for Medicaid, will help prevent a further gutting of public services that would make this concurrent health and economic crisis even worse. We cannot forgo the future of our students for a crisis that is not of their making. Moreover, nurses, food service personnel, teachers, postal workers, child and home care workers, transit workers, telecom workers, and other public service workers are front-line heroes working long hours to allow families to adhere to social distancing and, in many cases, risking their lives to serve our country. They must be defined as essential and supported financially throughout this public health and economic emergency as part of CARES 2.

**KEEP America competitive—hire people to build infrastructure:** With the highest number of unemployed Americans since the Great Depression, we need to both provide good jobs and strengthen our nation's workforce. This crisis is a wake-up call to make long overdue investments in a key pillar of the economy: our infrastructure. If not now, when will we ever reinvest in the vital infrastructure essential to protect our country and boost good job creation?

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This crisis of unknown proportions requires new thinking and new action. CARES 2 gives us the opportunity to keep top of mind the millions of people who work hard every day, play by the rules, and now need our collective support and decisive action. America's Five Economic Essentials provide a chance to calm our nation's angst and protect our nation's people.

Sincerely,



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