

Dear Representative/Senator:

The Coronavirus outbreak, or COVID-19, has shaken countries around the world and threatens a recession. Uncertainty grows as communities are struggling to respond. We applaud Congress for working in a bipartisan manner to pass an initial \$8.3 billion package, but that legislation is insufficient. We come from a variety of faith perspectives, but our moral principles and scriptural teachings all affirm that we must prioritize individuals most in need and enable all people to live with dignity and the opportunity to flourish.

As you develop another legislative package responding to the Coronavirus outbreak, we call on you to prioritize the needs of low-income people and their families. We have a sacred and moral obligation to ensure adequate resources reach those who do not have the financial ability to weather this crisis. Love of neighbor and care for those in poverty must be the hallmark of Congressional efforts to stem this health emergency and any related economic downturn.

We urge you to adhere to the following principles in any legislation that addresses the COVID-19 crisis:

- Ensure accessible and affordable testing and treatment for the Coronavirus, regardless of income, location, disability, or immigration status.
- Ensure all have the support they need to take sick leave and care for family members without risking their jobs or their paychecks.
- Ensure low-income workers and individuals facing hardship have the assistance they need to put food on the table and provide for their families.
- Give special care and attention to individuals at increased risk of infection, including individuals in prison, immigrants and children in detention, in long-term care facilities, and experiencing homelessness.
- Economic stimulus measures should focus first on low-income and vulnerable communities. Such policies also have the strongest economic impact. Any bailouts and emergency assistance for major industries and businesses must be paired with comparable assistance for low-wage workers and vulnerable individuals.
- Oppose any efforts to use the pandemic as an excuse to further militarize the border or exacerbate immigration deportation and detention.

Following these principles, we believe the legislation should specifically:

- **Enact paid sick and family leave for all workers.** In the U.S., more than 32 million workers lack access to paid sick days. Most are low-wage workers. Seventy percent of low-wage workers don't have access to paid sick days. These are jobs with significant public interaction: food preparation and service, personal home care, and childcare. Ensuring that every working individual has access to fourteen days of paid sick leave enables all workers to follow the CDC's guidance of 14 days of self-quarantine after potential exposure.

- **Increase and expand access to nutrition assistance to prevent families and individuals from going hungry.** The CDC recommends people stockpile two weeks of food, but families living paycheck-to-paycheck cannot afford to do so. Others may face reduced paychecks because of reduced hours, and school closures will leave children without access to school lunches and breakfasts.
  - **Implement the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**
  - **Increase SNAP benefit levels and allow flexibility in use,** one of the most effective ways to help stimulate the economy and enable stockpiling for self-quarantine.
- **Strengthen and modernize Unemployment Insurance** in order to provide higher benefits, account for the changing workforce (such as the gig economy), and cover workers who may lose their jobs or face new caregiving responsibilities due to the virus (such as school closures). Expand unemployment eligibility to include people whose hours have been reduced due to decreased demand, those whose wages come primarily from tips, those who have run out of sick days, and high-risk populations who need to self-quarantine to protect themselves.
- **Increase health care funding for states so they can adequately respond.** Congress should increase **the federal Medicaid match to states (FMAP)** and **establish a state stabilization fund** so states can adequately address the increased demand for health care and related costs. In the 2009 Recovery Act, the Federal Government picked up all of states' Medicaid costs. Doing so again would enable state and local governments, which are on the front lines of responding to the virus, to focus on providing necessary services.
- **Provide targeted rebate or stimulus checks directed at low-income individuals to most effectively boost the economy.** A stimulus check, such as what was included in the 2008 stimulus package, is more targeted than a payroll tax cut and doesn't threaten Social Security. It is delivered quickly in one lump sum and would bring a strong economic boost during a time of economic downturn due to the Coronavirus. A payroll tax cut, while another option, is slower, less targeted, and has a more muted impact. We caution against using this national emergency to pass tax cuts that will fail to produce quick results and favor those with the most resources to weather the crisis.
- **Fund work-sharing,** which allows businesses to cut hours instead of implementing layoffs. Workers can keep their jobs and maintain their incomes supplemented by Unemployment Insurance.
- **Increase funding for McKinney-Vento grants and the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP)** in order to reduce the number of people living in homeless encampments. Individuals experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of serious infection because they often live in congregated communities (like shelters and encampments), cannot self-quarantine, and often lack access to running water and other methods to prevent infection.
- **Provide funding to keep childcare centers** in business and support educators in the event that parents unenroll their children or cannot pay their childcare bills.
- **Boost benefits and waive the physical presence requirement for WIC** (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children) and **enable families to get their benefits remotely.**

- **Provide funding for tests, treatment, and quarantine, so that those without health insurance can access them.** No one should have to worry about the costs of seeking testing and treatment, which can lead to more people exposed to the virus.

We remain grateful for the work you have already done to address this health crisis. We pray for you as you continue your work to address the substantial unmet needs of those in poverty. May the Spirit of God bring you peace and wisdom to promote the common good.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists

American Muslim Health Professionals

Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative

Bread for the World

The Christian Reformed Church Office of Social Justice

Church World Service

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Disciples Center for Public Witness

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Islamic Relief USA

Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Jewish Women International

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches

National Council of Jewish Women

Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness

Sojourners

Truah

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries