



EXPLAINER

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A Weak System Under Attack: Coronavirus Exploits Our Nation's Chronic Disinvestment in Working Families

Last updated March 16, 2020

PCAF thanks AFSCME, Center for Economic and Policy Research, Center for Popular Democracy, Economic Policy Institute, Groundwork Collaborative, The Hub Project, Institute for Policy Studies, National Domestic Workers Alliance, National Employment Law Project, National Nurses United, National Partnership for Women & Families, Public Citizen, SEIU, Washington Center for Equitable Growth, Win Without War, and other progressive partners for their contributions and insights.

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Context

Nearly 140 million Americans are poor or low-income.¹ Twenty-eight million Americans lack health insurance.² Over a half-million Americans file for bankruptcy each year due to medical expenses.³ Thirty-four million American workers have no access to paid sick days.⁴

These are long standing problems, but the threat of coronavirus brings into stark relief the risks we face because of our government's chronic disinvestment in our health and well-being. People go to their jobs sick for fear of losing their paychecks, and those who are sick forgo testing and treatment due to cost - putting all of us at greater risk of contracting the virus.

Unless we act to provide support for our health care system and working families, the coronavirus and any future public health crisis will infect far more people and do far greater damage to families' finances and the economy than they otherwise would.

The House has taken critical steps by advancing two emergency coronavirus response packages:

- 1. H.R. 6074, Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020 (signed into law on March 6, 2020)**
- 2. H.R. 6201, Families First Coronavirus Response Act (passed the House on March 13, 2020, awaiting Senate action)**

The Trump Administration has taken executive actions as well, such as declaring a national state of emergency. Meanwhile, the House is now developing a third coronavirus package.

This document summarizes congressional and administrative actions so far, provides further recommendations on how we can rise to the challenge of this pandemic, and highlights coronavirus resources from across the progressive community.

This document is regularly updated. If you have suggested updates, please email matt@progressivecaucuscenter.org and alan@progressivecaucuscenter.org.

General resources

- [H.R. 6074, Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020 Title-By-Title Summary](#), House Appropriations Committee
- [H.R. 6201, Families First Coronavirus Response Act Title-by-Title Summary](#) (as passed by the House), House Appropriations Committee
- [Communicating in Crisis: Coronavirus](#), Navigator Research

¹ Institute for Policy Studies. The Souls of Poor Folk, p. 9. April 2018.

<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/PPC-Audit-Full-410835a.pdf>

² Jennifer Tolbert, Kendal Orgera, Natalie Singer, and Anthony Damico. "Key Facts about the Uninsured Population." Kaiser Family Foundation. 13 December 2019.

<https://www.kff.org/uninsured/issue-brief/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>

³ Lorie Konish. "This is the real reason most Americans file for bankruptcy." CNBC. 11 February 2019.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/11/this-is-the-real-reason-most-americans-file-for-bankruptcy.html>

⁴ National Partnership for Women and Families. "Quick Facts." Support Paid Sick Days. 2020.

<http://www.paidicksdays.org/research-resources/quick-facts.html>

- [The Care Economy: Policies & Polling on Mitigating the Effects of the Coronavirus](#), Data for Progress
- [Coronavirus Prevention That Works For Working People](#), Liz Watson, Congressional Progressive Caucus Center, Our Future
- [How The Government Could Actually Support Working Families During a Health Crisis](#), Melissa Boteach, National Women's Law Center
- [Republicans Want Medicare for All, but Just for This One Disease](#), Farhad Manjoo, The New York Times
- [The Virus Revealed a Rot in the American Economy](#), Janelle Jones, Groundwork Collaborative, Barron's
- [Let's Get Serious About Fighting the Corona Depression](#), Robert Kuttner, The American Prospect
- [Coronavirus and the Next Recession: Suggested Talking Points](#), Groundwork Collaborative
- [Coronavirus Resource Kit](#), multiple organizations

Access to testing, treatment, and prevention

Background

People without insurance are less likely to get tested and treated for the coronavirus, increasing the likelihood that they will infect others. One in five uninsured Americans went without needed medical care in 2018, and they are less likely to receive preventative health care.⁵ If the Supreme Court challenge to the Affordable Care Act is successful, an additional 20 million Americans would join the 28 million Americans already lacking insurance.⁶

The Trump Administration has repeatedly attacked health care coverage in its budgets, including a proposed \$900 billion cut to Medicaid in February 2020. Even during negotiations of the second coronavirus package (H.R. 6201), the Administration tried to push abortion restrictions.⁷ In addition, the Administration has reportedly blocked states from expanding Medicaid to fight coronavirus.⁸

⁵ Tolbert, et al. 2019

⁶ Linda J. Blumberg, Matthew Buettgens, John Holahan, and Clare Pan. "State-by-State Estimates of the Coverage and Funding Consequences of Full Repeal of the ACA," p. 12. Urban Institute. March 2019. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100000/repeal_of_the_aca_by_state.pdf

⁷ Miriam Berg. "Trump Administration Weakened Our Health Care Infrastructure. Now It Can't Respond to Coronavirus." Planned Parenthood Action Fund. 13 March 2020. <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/blog/trump-administration-weakened-our-health-care-infrastructure-now-it-cant-respond-to-coronavirus>

⁸ Jake Johnson. "Cruelty 'Off the Charts' as Trump Blocks States From Expanding Medicaid in Response to Coronavirus." Common Dreams. 13 March 2020. <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/03/13/cruelty-charts-trump-blocks-states-expanding-medi-caid-response-coronavirus>

The Trump Administration has refused to guarantee affordability of a coronavirus vaccine. Health and Human Service Secretary Alex Azar said, “We would want to ensure that we work to make it affordable, but we can’t control that price.”⁹

Actions taken

H.R. 6074 included \$300 million to cover **tests, vaccines, and therapies for those who cannot afford them**. It also expanded access to **telehealth** through Medicare. For a future coronavirus vaccine, H.R. 6074 included language to ensure the government pays a **fair price for a future vaccine** and that the commercial price can be regulated if necessary.¹⁰

H.R. 6201 requires private health insurers, Medicare Part B, Medicare Advantage, Medicaid, CHIP, TRICARE, and the Indian Health Service and to **cover coronavirus testing, including the cost of the provider, urgent care, or emergency room visit, at no cost to the patient**.¹¹ (This is more robust than the agreement the Trump Administration announced with insurance companies.)¹²

H.R. 6201 **increases the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP)**, which supports state Medicaid programs, and **prohibits states from tightening Medicaid eligibility** during this public health emergency. Furthermore, it provides \$1 billion to the National Disaster Medical System to **reimburse for testing and services provided to the uninsured**. It also provides additional funding to cover testing through the Veterans Health Administration, Indian Health Service, and Defense Health Program.¹³

H.R. 6201 did not include abortion restrictions sought by Republicans.¹⁴

Next steps

While H.R. 6201 took important steps to eliminate out-of-pocket costs for coronavirus testing, private health insurers have made no assurances regarding coronavirus treatment.¹⁵ **Coronavirus testing, treatment, and vaccination should be free to everyone** in the U.S., regardless of their insurance status or immigration status. Congress can adopt coronavirus-specific measures in this immediate crisis. In the long run, the best way to ensure everyone gets the health care they need is through a **Medicare for All** system (H.R.

⁹ Donald Cohen. “To slow down coronavirus, we need a public health approach that’s truly ‘public.’” In the Public Interest. 11 March 2020.

<https://www.inthepublicinterest.org/to-slow-down-coronavirus-we-need-a-public-health-approach-that-s-truly-public/>

¹⁰ House Appropriations Committee. “H.R. 6074, Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020: Title-By-Title Summary.” 4 March 2020.

<https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/Coronavirus%20Supp%20Summary%203.4.20.pdf>

¹¹ House Appropriations Committee. “H.R. 6201, Families First Coronavirus Response Act Title-By-Title Summary.” 14 March 2020.

<https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/Families%20First%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf>

¹² The White House. “Remarks by President Trump and Vice President Pence at a Coronavirus Briefing with Health Insurers.” 10 March 2020.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-coronavirus-briefing-health-insurers/>

¹³ House Appropriations Committee 14 March 2020

¹⁴ Office of Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky. “Schakowsky Votes for Families First During Coronavirus Pandemic.” 14 March 2020.

<https://schakowsky.house.gov/media/press-releases/schakowsky-votes-families-first-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

¹⁵ Melinda St. Louis. “Insurers Remain Greedy During a Global Pandemic.” Public Citizen. 12 March 2020.

<https://www.citizen.org/news/insurers-remain-greedy-during-a-global-pandemic/>

1384, Medicare for All Act of 2019). During any pandemic, Medicare for All would eliminate financial barriers that keep people from seeking help when they are sick.

Congress and the Administration must ensure ongoing access to **home- and community-based services** through Medicaid that could be disrupted by coronavirus.

Additionally, the government must protect against pharmaceutical corporation profiteering, and ensure treatments and vaccines are accessible around the world. To those ends, the federal government should issue **open, non-exclusive licenses for coronavirus vaccines or treatments** developed with government support and **require reasonable pricing and access globally** in all coronavirus grants, contracts, and licensing arrangements.

Congress should continue to **reject abortion restrictions** in appropriations bills (H.R. 1692, EACH WOMAN Act).

Resources

- [Civil Society Letter to President Trump Calling for Reasonable Pricing and Access to Coronavirus Vaccines and Treatments](#), Public Citizen
- [Coronavirus makes the case for Medicare-for-all](#), Helaine Olen, The Washington Post
- [Trump Administration Weakened Our Health Care Infrastructure. Now It Can't Respond to Coronavirus.](#), Planned Parenthood Action Fund

Public health response

Background

President Trump initially requested only \$2.5 billion to address coronavirus. The U.S. was already woefully unprepared. Programs that would help prevent and respond to diseases like coronavirus have suffered under cuts to nondefense discretionary spending.¹⁶ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) budget is down 10% over the last decade adjusting for inflation, and state and local health departments have lost a quarter of their workforce since 2008.¹⁷

Actions taken

H.R. 6074, the **\$8.3 billion coronavirus response package** now enacted in law, was more than triple the amount requested by the President and did not include the cuts to other health programs the President proposed to offset costs. The package provided \$2.2 billion for **public health funding**, including \$950 million in direct support for state and local governments fighting coronavirus. It provided \$1 billion for **medical supplies, health care preparedness, and medical surge capacity**.¹⁸

¹⁶ Win Without War. "Messaging Guidance: The Coronavirus Epidemic and U.S. Foreign Policy." 2 March 2020. https://winwithoutwar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-Messaging-3_2_2020-1.pdf

¹⁷ Julie Bosman and Richard Fausset. "The Coronavirus Swamps Local Health Departments, Already Crippled by Cuts." The New York Times. 14 March 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/14/us/coronavirus-health-departments.html>

¹⁸ House Appropriations Committee 4 March 2020

Next steps

Congress may need to provide **additional emergency funds** as the coronavirus pandemic continues. Going forward, public health systems need an **additional \$4.5 billion per year to close existing gaps**.¹⁹

Resources

- [The \\$8.3 Billion Coronavirus Supplemental](#), House Appropriations Committee

Research

Background

Research funding for emerging infectious and zoonotic diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is down 10% since 2016 (adjusted for inflation).²⁰

Actions taken

H.R. 6074 directed \$3 billion into **research** on testing, treatment, and vaccine development.²¹

Next steps

Congress must follow emergency appropriations with **consistent investment in infectious disease research** in FY 2021 appropriations and beyond so the U.S. is not caught flat-footed the next time a public health emergency arises.

Resources

- [Fluctuating funding and flagging interest hurt coronavirus research, leaving crucial knowledge gaps](#), Helen Branswell and Megan Thielking, STAT

Global health

Background

President Trump has repeatedly proposed massive cuts to global health programs. At the beginning of February 2020, when coronavirus was already a known global health issue, the President's Budget proposed cutting U.S. funding for the World Health Organization in half and cutting global health programs overall by \$3 billion.²² In 2018, the President's National Security Council disbanded its global health security and biodefense directorate, which has helped address past global health crises like Ebola.²³

¹⁹ Public Health Leadership Forum. "Developing a Financing System to Support Public Health Infrastructure." Resolve. https://www.resolve.ngo/docs/phlf_developingafinancingsystemtosupportpublichealth636869439688663025.pdf

²⁰ Linda J. Bilmes. "Budget Cuts Have Made the US Less Ready for Coronavirus." Inkstick. 3 February 2020. <https://inkstickmedia.com/budget-cuts-have-made-the-us-less-ready-for-coronavirus/>

²¹ House Appropriations Committee 4 March 2020

²² Robbie Gramer and Colum Lynch. "Trump Seeks to Halve U.S. Funding for World Health Organization as Coronavirus Rages." Foreign Policy. 10 February 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/10/trump-world-health-organization-funding-coronavirus-state-department-usaid-budget-cuts/>

²³ Bilmes 2020

Actions taken

For global health efforts, H.R. 6074 directed a total of \$1.25 billion for the **global response to coronavirus**. That included \$435 million for overseas health systems, \$300 million to address humanitarian needs due to coronavirus, and \$250 million for economic and security stabilization. In addition, it provided \$300 million for global disease detection and emergency response.²⁴

Next steps

Congress should follow these emergency efforts with **sustained investment in global health**.

The Administration should reestablish the National Security Council and Department of Homeland Security global health security teams and staff them with qualified people.²⁵

Resources

- [Messaging Guidance: The Coronavirus Epidemic and U.S. Foreign Policy](#), Win Without War

Paid sick days and family and medical leave

Background

Whether coronavirus or the flu, viruses spread more easily when sick workers continue going to work. Unfortunately, many workers living paycheck to paycheck can't afford to take the time off if they have possibly been exposed to coronavirus: 1 in 3 private-sector workers, 7 in 10 low-wage workers, 3 in 4 personal care and service workers, and 4 in 5 restaurant workers have no paid sick days. Workers without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely to go to work with contagious illnesses and twice as likely to send sick children to school or daycare.²⁶

Beyond loss of pay, many of these same workers face greater risk that they will lose their jobs altogether if they are absent due to their own health or the health of a family member. While the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides up to 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave, 40% of workers are excluded from FMLA - specifically newly hired workers, part-time workers, and workers at small employers. Use of FMLA to care for a sick family member is restricted to a spouse, child, or parent.

Actions taken

H.R. 6201 requires government employers and employers with fewer than 500 employees to provide emergency paid sick leave and emergency family and medical leave. Workers can take up to **two weeks of paid sick leave** at full pay for coronavirus testing, care, or

²⁴ House Appropriations Committee 4 March 2020

²⁵ Office of Congressman Don Beyer. "60 House Dems Demand Improved Coronavirus Response From Trump Administration." 4 March 2020.
<https://beyer.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=4741>

²⁶ National Partnership for Women and Families. "Paid Sick Days Improve Public Health," p. 3. February 2020.
<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-improve-our-public-health.pdf>

quarantine. They can take paid sick leave at $\frac{2}{3}$ pay care for a family member or child whose school or child care facility has closed.

Workers who have been on the job for at least 30 days can take **up to 12 weeks of job-protected family and medical leave** for a quarantine, care for a family member who is quarantined, or care for children if the school or child care facility is closed. After the two weeks of paid sick leave, the worker receives $\frac{2}{3}$ pay for additional weeks of leave. The bill also guarantees leave for workers under multiemployer bargaining agreements.²⁷

Importantly, the definition of “family member” is more expansive than the current FMLA definition, including sibling, grandparent, grandchild, and next of kin.²⁸

Employers will receive a refundable payroll tax credit equal to the qualified paid sick leave wages and family and medical leave wages. A refundable income tax credit is available to self-employed individuals.²⁹

Next steps

H.R. 6201 provides an important guarantee of paid sick and paid family and medical leave for millions of workers during the coronavirus pandemic. However, it excludes employers with more than 500 employees. Hardship exemptions for employers with less than 50 employees could further limit the impact of the legislation.³⁰ Congress should close these gaps to **guarantee all workers have access to emergency paid leave.**

The paid leave provisions of H.R. 6201 are also temporary and restricted to coronavirus. The **Healthy Families Act** (H.R. 1784) would set a federal floor of seven paid sick days that workers can accrue to address their health needs or care for a sick family member for any illness.³¹ Sector-specific approaches can help ensure at-risk workers at small employers are covered. The **Domestic Worker Bill of Rights** (H.R. 3760) would provide paid sick days for domestic workers, including homecare workers.³²

Several permanent improvements to FMLA would help workers who need to take longer-term absences due to illness. The **Family Medical Leave Modernization Act** (H.R. 5456) would expand the definition of “family” under FMLA to cover care for a domestic partner, parent-in-law, aunt, uncle, sibling, adult child, grandparent, grandchild, son- or daughter-in-law, or other significant relationship. **FMLA should be expanded** to workers at smaller employers, workers with lower hours, and workers with less tenure. Finally, the U.S. could ease families’ financial burdens by establishing a federal **paid family and medical**

²⁷ House Appropriations Committee 14 March 2020

²⁸ A Better Balance. “Federal Coronavirus Proposal: The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201).” 14 March 2020. <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/federal-coronavirus-proposal-the-families-first-coronavirus-response-act-h-r-6201/>

²⁹ House Appropriations Committee 14 March 2020

³⁰ The Editorial Board. “There’s a Giant Hole in Pelosi’s Coronavirus Bill.” The New York Times. 14 March 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/14/opinion/coronavirus-pelosi-sick-leave.html>

³¹ National Partnership for Women & Families. “Healthy Families Act.” September 2019. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/the-healthy-families-act-fact-sheet.pdf>

³² Office of U.S. Senator Kamala D. Harris. “Harris, Jayapal Announce Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.” 15 July 2019. <https://www.harris.senate.gov/news/press-releases/harris-jayapal-announce-domestic-workers-bill-of-rights>

leave insurance program (H.R. 1185, FAMILY Act). This program would be sustainably funded through payroll contributions.³³

Resources

- [Federal Coronavirus Proposal: The Families First Coronavirus Response Act \(H.R. 6201\), A Better Balance](#)
- [Why national paid sick time is key to fighting the coronavirus](#), Heather Boushey, Washington Center for Equitable Growth, Medium
- [Lack of Paid Sick Leave Risks Public Health During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#), Diana Boesch, Sara Jane Glynn, & Shilpa Phadke, Center for American Progress
- [Amid COVID-19 outbreak, the workers who need paid sick days the most have the least](#), Elise Gould, Economic Policy Institute
- [Paid Sick Days Improve Public Health](#), National Partnership for Women & Families
- [Trump's payroll tax cuts are a terrible opening bid to address the economic fallout of COVID-19](#), Josh Bivens, Economic Policy Institute

Unemployment Insurance

Background

Beyond workers who need paid leave while absent due to coronavirus, additional families could experience a reduction in income as workplaces shut down and economic activity declines. Unemployment Insurance (UI) is already available to many workers in the event that their workplace is shut down, but state UI offices have limited capacity to deal with new claimants. In addition, several states have reduced benefits and made it harder to qualify.³⁴ Unfortunately, many workers affected by coronavirus, including self-employed workers and gig workers, are not even eligible for regular UI.³⁵

Actions taken

H.R. 6201 provides \$1 billion in **emergency grants to states to administer UI benefits** and authorizes **interest-free loans to help states pay UI benefits**. To receive grants, states take basic steps to **promote benefits access**: requiring notification of potential UI eligibility to laid-off workers, providing remote options to apply for benefits, and informing applicants on the status of their application. Half of the funding is set aside for high-unemployment states (more than a 10% increase in unemployment). Those states would be required to **ease work search requirements, waiting periods, and increases in UI taxes on employers**. For high

³³ National Partnership for Women & Families. "Legislative Proposals for Updating the Family and Medical Leave Act." February 2020.

<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fmla/updating-the-fmla.pdf>

³⁴ Olugbenga Ajilore. "The United States Is Not Ready for a Recession, But It Can Be." Center for American Progress. 27 September 2019.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2019/09/27/475075/united-states-not-ready-recession-can/>

³⁵ Michele Evermore. "Coronavirus and Unemployment Insurance: Options for Lawmakers to Mitigate Job Loss." National Employment Law Project. 6 March 2020.

<https://www.nelp.org/publication/unemployment-insurance-helps-mitigate-job-loss-during-pandemics-options-for-policymakers/>

unemployment states eligible for grants, the **federal government fully covers Extended Benefits**, an additional 26 weeks of UI benefits triggered after regular benefits exhausted.

H.R. 6201 also requires the Department of Labor to provide technical assistance for states trying to set **Short-Term Compensation (STC)** programs, also known as work sharing to avoid layoffs.³⁶ Workers under STC receive a portion of unemployment benefits to replace lost wages. Twenty-seven states and DC currently have STC programs.³⁷

The Department of Labor has already issued **guidance on how states can make UI benefits available** when coronavirus prevents workers from working.³⁸

Next steps

The UI system needs **comprehensive reform and expansion**. Congress should **eliminate the “waiting week” requirements** in 42 states that delay receipt of UI and cover the cost of the first week of benefits (S. 3482).³⁹ **Work search requirement waivers should be expanded** so UI recipients can comply with social distancing recommendations. Workers need **remote access to career counseling and reemployment assistance**. Workers who quit due to health and safety concerns or to care for a family member have **good cause to quit** and should be eligible for UI.⁴⁰

Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is available to workers ineligible for regular UI, including self-employed individuals, who are no longer working due to federally declared disaster.⁴¹ However, President Trump’s emergency declaration did not trigger DUA. DUA should be extended or a parallel program could be created for coronavirus. DUA should be improved by **increasing the benefit amount** to 1.5 times the national average state UI benefit, **extending the length of benefits**, and allowing people to **receive DUA before exhausting regular UI**.⁴²

Resources

- [Congress Must Act to Support Working Families During COVID-19 Crisis](#), National Women’s Law Center
- [Coronavirus and Unemployment Insurance: Options for Lawmakers to Mitigate Job Loss](#), Michele Evermore, National Employment Law Project

³⁶ House Appropriations Committee 14 March 2020

³⁷ United States Department of Labor. “Short-Time Compensation.” https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/docs/stc_fact_sheet.pdf

³⁸ Reuters. “U.S. Labor Department allows jobless benefits for coronavirus.” 12 March 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-economy-labor/u-s-labor-department-allows-jobless-benefits-fo-r-coronavirus-idUSKBN20Z34V>

³⁹ Office of Senator Cory Booker. “CORONAVIRUS: Booker Introduces Bill to Get Unemployment Assistance Immediately to Laid-Off Workers.” 12 March 2020. https://www.booker.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=1073

⁴⁰ National Women’s Law Center. “Congress Must Act to Support Working Families During COVID-19 Crisis.” 10 March 2020.

<https://nwlcc.org/press-releases/congress-must-act-to-support-working-families-during-covid-19-crisis/>

⁴¹ Benefits.gov. “Disaster Unemployment Assistance.” <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/597>

⁴² National Employment Law Project. “Rebooting Disaster Unemployment Assistance: Steps for State and Federal Policymakers.” 11 March 2020. <https://www.nelp.org/publication/rebooting-disaster-unemployment-assistance-steps-state-federal-policymakers/>

- [Rebooting Disaster Unemployment Assistance: Steps for State and Federal Policymakers](#), National Employment Law Project
- [Coronavirus Bill a First Step to Badly Needed Fixes to Unemployment Insurance \(UI\) Benefits](#), Andrew Stettner, The Century Foundation

Nutrition assistance

Background

If schools are shut down to mitigate the spread of coronavirus, the 22 million children who rely on free and reduced lunches could go hungry. Tragically, the Trump Administration has moved to reduce benefits and restrict eligibility under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).⁴³ On March 13, a federal judge granted an injunction on an Administration proposal to remove up to 700,000 Americans from SNAP.⁴⁴

The coronavirus pandemic is stretching the resources of Meal on Wheels and other services providing food to seniors.⁴⁵

Actions taken

H.R. 6201 includes \$500 million in emergency funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** and \$400 million in emergency funding for **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**, which supports local food banks. It also allows states to provide emergency **food assistance to households with children eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch** whose schools are closed for 5+ days. It allows for **waivers for states to address child nutrition needs**, such as waiving meal pattern requirements and requirements for the food to be consumed onsite). It **waives the work and working training requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** and allows states to provide **emergency SNAP benefits**.

For senior citizens, H.R. 6201 provides \$250 million (25 million additional meals) for the **Senior Nutrition Program**.⁴⁶

Next steps

Congress should **Increase SNAP benefits** as proposed in H.R. 6181, the Ensuring Emergency Food Security Act.⁴⁷

⁴³ Office of Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro. "DeLauro, Bishop Urge USDA Secretary to Ensure Families Have Food Security During Coronavirus Outbreak." 9 March 2020. <https://delaurow.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/delauro-bishop-urge-usda-secretary-ensure-families-have-food-security>

⁴⁴ Matt Keeley. "Federal judge blocks cuts to food stamps, says coronavirus pandemic makes benefits 'essential.'" Newsweek. 13 March 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/federal-judge-blocks-cuts-food-stamps-says-coronavirus-pandemic-make-s-benefits-essential-1492309>

⁴⁵ Will Peischel. "Meals on Wheels Is Already Feeling the Symptoms of Coronavirus." Mother Jones. 13 March 2020. <https://www.motherjones.com/food/2020/03/meals-on-wheels-is-already-feeling-the-symptoms-of-coronavirus/>

⁴⁶ House Appropriations Committee 14 March 2020

⁴⁷ Office of Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro. "DeLauro, McGovern, Lee, Fudge, Hayes, Haaland, Pingree, Pocan Introduce Emergency Food Security Bill Amid Growing Coronavirus Outbreak." 11 March 2020. <https://delaurow.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/delauro-mcgovern-lee-fudge-hayes-haaland-pingree-pocan-introduce>

Resources

- [Coronavirus and Food Access: Four Questions Every Community Needs to Answer](#), Devon Klatell, The Rockefeller Foundation

Worker protections

Background

Workers who care for children and the sick, clean homes and buildings, and work in the service sector have inadequate protections during this pandemic. Health care workers are at especially high risk, and insufficient protections put both workers and patients in danger.

A recent survey of nurses (response through March 3) show major gaps in preparedness and training at health care facilities. Less than half of nurses reported receiving information about coronavirus from their employer. Less than 3 in 10 reported isolation plans for patients with possible coronavirus infection. Many lack access to respirators, and only 30% report sufficient stock of personal protective equipment (PPE). While these numbers may have improved in recent weeks, it demonstrates how unprepared the health care system is for a crisis like coronavirus.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the CDC has weakened PPE standards, allowing surgical masks instead of respirators for health care workers interacting with coronavirus patients and weakening requirements for isolating coronavirus patients.⁴⁹

Domestic workers play a critical role in caring for the sick and elderly who are at increased risk during coronavirus. However, those workers are largely excluded from protections under the National Labor Relations Act, Fair Labor Standards Act, and Occupational Safety and Health Act.⁵⁰

Service-sector workers are interacting regularly with the public, which means they can be exposed to and expose others to coronavirus. However, practices like tipped wages intensify income disruption if a worker misses work due to illness, serves fewer customers, or reduces hours.⁵¹

Similarly, many gig workers face risk of exposure as they drive customers and make deliveries. Gig workers classified as independent contractors are generally excluded from worker protections, including Unemployment Insurance and other programs that would mitigate loss of income during coronavirus.⁵²

⁴⁸ National Nurses United. "Survey of Nation's Frontline Registered Nurses Shows Hospitals Unprepared For COVID-19." 5 March 2020.

<https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/press/survey-nations-frontline-registered-nurses-shows-hospital-s-unprepared-covid-19>

⁴⁹ National Nurses United. "As CDC further weakens COVID-19 guidance, nurses outraged by failed federal, state, local, employer efforts stage day of action Wednesday to demand protections for nurses, patients, public." 10 March 2020.

<https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/press/cdc-further-weakens-covid-19-guidance-nurses-outraged-failed-federal-state-local-employer>

⁵⁰ Ai-jen Poo. "Protect Caregivers from Coronavirus." The New York Times. 9 March 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/opinion/protect-caregivers-from-coronavirus.html>

⁵¹ Lori Fox. "Coronavirus Is Spreading. Your Waiter Can't Stay Home To Stop It." Talk Poverty. 6 March 2020. <https://talkpoverty.org/2020/03/06/covid-19-coronavirus-service-workers/>

⁵² Laura Padin. "Precarious at Work, Precarious in Health." National Employment Law Project. 13 March 2020. <https://www.nelp.org/blog/precarius-work-precarius-health/>

Actions taken

H.R. 6074 provided \$500 million to procure pharmaceutical, protective equipment, and other **medical supplies** for health care providers. It also provided \$10 million for training through the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.⁵³

H.R. 6201 includes personal respiratory protective devices under PREP Act Declaration, which provides protection from liability for disease countermeasures.⁵⁴

Next steps

Health care workers and other workers at high risk of exposure need **clear communication and training** on current risks, testing, and best practices to avoid transmission. This guidance should be available in all languages.

Congress should direct the Occupational Safety and Administration (OSHA) to adopt an **Emergency Temporary Standard** requiring employers to develop comprehensive infectious disease exposure control plans to protect health care workers.⁵⁵ This provision was in the H.R. 6201 as introduced but was removed in negotiations with the Trump Administration.

The federal government should ensure adequate **manufacture and distribution of PPE and cleaning supplies**.

Unions are a key mechanism for workers to insist on safe workplaces as well as a critical source for worker training. **Strengthening collective bargaining rights** for private-sector workers (H.R. 2474, Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2019) and public-sector workers (H.R. 3463, Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act of 2019) will give them the power to insist their employers to take all necessary safety measures. H.R. 2474 would also **reduce worker misclassification**, which deprives workers of important protections and benefits.⁵⁶

The **Domestic Worker Bill of Rights** (H.R. 3760) would extend basic worker rights to domestic workers, such as the ability to adjust their schedules and request time off.⁵⁷

Both H.R. 582, the Raise the Wage Act, (passed by the House on July 18, 2019) and H.R. 2148, the BE HEARD in the Workplace Act, would **eliminate the tipped minimum wage**.

Existing labor protections and standards are even more important during a public health emergency and should not be waived.

Resources

- [Letter to the Secretary of Labor Calling for OSHA to Establish an Emergency Temporary Standard to Protect Workers from the Novel Coronavirus](#), multiple organizations

⁵³ House Appropriations Committee 4 March 2020

⁵⁴ House Appropriations Committee 14 March 2020

⁵⁵ House Appropriations Committee. "H.R. 6201, Families First Coronavirus Response Act Title-by-Title Summary." 11 March 2020.

<https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/Families%20First%20Summary.pdf>

⁵⁶ Rep. Mark Pocan and Kenneth Rigmaiden. "The PRO Act: Good for workers and good for business." The Hill. 3 October 2019.

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/labor/464223-the-pro-act-good-for-workers-and-good-for-business>

⁵⁷ Office of U.S. Senator Kamala D. Harris 2019

- [Protect Caregivers From Coronavirus](#), Ai-jen Poo, National Domestic Workers Alliance, The New York Times
- [Precarious at Work, Precarious in Health](#), Laura Padin, National Employment Law Project
- [Survey of Nation's Frontline Registered Nurses Shows Hospitals Unprepared For COVID-19](#), National Nurses United/California Nurses Association

Small businesses

Background

Small businesses are experiencing sudden drops in revenue as customers disappear due to social distancing.⁵⁸

Actions taken

H.R. 6074 provided for \$7 billion in **loans to small businesses** impacted by coronavirus.⁵⁹ On March 12, the Small Business Administration (SBA) announced **Economic Injury Disaster Assistance Loans** will be available to small businesses.⁶⁰

Next steps

H.R. 6268, the SBA Business Stabilization Direct Loan Program Act of 2020, would allow the SBA to make direct no-interest loans to small businesses affected by coronavirus.⁶¹ Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) can also provide **short-term, low-interest lending options** for small businesses during the downturn.

Small businesses may need the ability to **defer tax payments, rent payments, utility payments, and other debts** as business reduces during the pandemic.⁶²

In addition to loans and debt relief, **direct cash assistance** would provide vital assistance to small businesses.

Resources

- [Supporting Small Businesses During Coronavirus](#), Main Street Alliance

⁵⁸ Jeanne Whalen. "Keeping your distance is good for public health but tough for small businesses." The Washington Post. 13 March 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/03/13/small-business-impact-coronavirus/>

⁵⁹ House Appropriations Committee 4 March 2020

⁶⁰ U.S. Small Business Administration. "SBA to Provide Disaster Assistance Loans for Small Businesses Impacted by Coronavirus (COVID-19)." 12 March 2020.

<https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/sba-newsroom/press-releases-media-advisories/sba-provide-disaster-assistance-loans-small-businesses-impacted-coronavirus-covid-19>

⁶¹ House Small Business Committee. "Velázquez Introduces Legislation to Create New Direct Lending Program for Small Businesses Impacted by COVID-19." 12 March 2020.

<https://smallbusiness.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3209>

⁶² Main Street Alliance. "Supporting Small Business During Coronavirus." 10 March 2020.

https://www.mainstreetalliance.org/supporting_small_business_during_coronavirus

Cash assistance

Background

Households need immediate assistance to cover expenses while work is disrupted and temper the economic downturn caused by coronavirus.

President Trump proposed a temporary cut in the Social Security payroll tax as an economic stimulus. This is not the first time President Trump has contemplated a payroll tax cut.⁶³ However, it is ill-suited to the present moment. A payroll tax cut only helps workers who are still able to work. It does nothing for the self-employed. It distributes small amounts over an extended period of time rather than immediate assistance that struggling families need. Corporations could pocket the tax cut on the employer side instead of raising wages.⁶⁴ Cutting the payroll tax without backfilling the Social Security Trust Fund could also weaken Social Security's finances and lead to benefit cuts or privatization.⁶⁵

Next steps

To immediately put money in the hands of families who need it, Congress should enact **direct cash assistance targeted at low- and moderate-income families**.⁶⁶ Unlike income tax cuts, payroll tax cuts, or tax breaks to corporations, targeted cash payments reach families most at risk in an economic downturn, including individuals who are not currently working or lose their jobs.⁶⁷

There are several possible delivery mechanisms for cash assistance. The federal government could send out checks.⁶⁸ It could eliminate the first \$500 in tax withholding in the coming months.⁶⁹ It could reinstate President Obama's Make Work Pay tax credit, a refundable tax credit.⁷⁰ It could provide an emergency Earned Income Tax Credit.⁷¹ The key design elements

⁶³ David Dayen. "Trump First Proposed a Payroll Tax Cut Six Months Ago." *The American Prospect*. 11 March 2020. <https://prospect.org/power/trump-first-proposed-payroll-tax-cut-six-months-ago/>

⁶⁴ Seth Hanlon & Andres Vinelli. "The Coronavirus Is an Economic Emergency Requiring a Forceful, Well-Targeted Response." *Center for American Progress*. 13 March 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2020/03/13/481765/coronavirus-economic-emergency-requiring-forceful-well-targeted-response/>

⁶⁵ Nancy J. Altman and Alex Lawson. "Social Security Works Opposes Payroll Tax Cut." *Social Security Works*. 10 March 2020.

<https://socialsecurityworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Trump-FICA-Cut-Proposal-Letter-FINAL.pdf>

⁶⁶ Josh Bivens. "Economic policy and COVID-19—Mitigate harm and plan for the future." *Economic Policy Institute*. 3 March 2020.

<https://www.epi.org/blog/economic-policy-and-covid-19-mitigate-harm-and-plan-for-the-future-a-list-of-considerations-for-policy-makers/>

⁶⁷ Claudia Sahm. "U.S. economic policymakers need to fight the coronavirus now." *Washington Center for Equitable Growth*. 4 March 2020.

<https://equitablegrowth.org/u-s-economic-policymakers-need-to-fight-the-coronavirus-now/>

⁶⁸ Chye-Ching Huang. "Far Better Ways Than Payroll Tax Cut to Contain Virus's Economic Damage." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. 10 March 2020.

<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/far-better-ways-than-payroll-tax-cut-to-contain-virus-economic-damage>

⁶⁹ Claudia Sahm. "The U.S. economy is in a tailspin—policymakers must do everything they can to protect workers and their families." *Washington Center for Equitable Growth*. 13 March 2020.

<https://equitablegrowth.org/the-u-s-economy-is-in-a-tailspin-policymakers-must-do-everything-they-can-to-protect-workers-and-their-families/>

⁷⁰ Dean Baker. "Planning the Anti-Recession Stimulus: The Make Work Pay Tax Credit." *Center for Economic and Policy Research*. 9 March 2020.

<https://cepr.net/planning-the-anti-recession-stimulus-the-make-work-pay-tax-credit/>

⁷¹ Office of Congressman Ro Khanna. "Reps. Ryan, Khanna propose cash infusion between \$1,000-\$6,000 to help working class Americans during COVID-19 crisis." 13 March 2020.

are making sure the delivery is fast, the amount is sufficient, and that the aid is directed to those that need it most, including those who do not have salaried jobs.

Resources

- [The Coronavirus is an Economic Emergency Requiring a Forceful, Well-Targeted Response](#), Seth Hanlon & Andres Vinelli, Center for American Progress
- [The U.S. economy is in a tailspin—policymakers must do everything they can to protect workers and their families](#), Claudia Sahm, Washington Center for Equitable Growth
- [Getting serious about the economic response to COVID-19](#), Josh Bivens, Economic Policy Institute
- [The Case for a Big Coronavirus Stimulus](#), Jason Furman, Harvard Kennedy School, Wall Street Journal
- [Poorly targeted tax cuts not a response to COVID-19 emergency](#), Americans for Tax Fairness
- [Social Security Works Opposes Payroll Tax Cut](#), Nancy J. Altman & Alex Lawson, Social Security Works
- [Far Better Ways Than Payroll Tax Cut to Contain Virus's Economic Damage](#), Chye-Ching Huang, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- [Planning the Anti-Recession Stimulus: The Make Work Pay Tax Credit](#), Dean Baker, Center for Economic and Policy Research
- [Trump's payroll tax cut would destroy Social Security without helping workers](#), Michael Hiltzik, Los Angeles Times

Aid to hard-hit industries

Background

Coronavirus and the resulting social distancing have hit the travel and hospitality industries especially hard. Airlines are rapidly canceling flights, grounding planes, and reducing staff.⁷² Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has specifically raised the need to aid airlines, cruises, and hotels.⁷³ House leadership has talked more generally about legislation to address economic damage.⁷⁴ Congress should try to prevent major job losses, but support for struggling industries should not become bailouts for CEOs and shareholders

<https://khanna.house.gov/media/press-releases/release-reps-ryan-khanna-propose-cash-infusion-between-1000-6000-help-working>

⁷² Niraj Chokshi. "Airlines Cancel Flights and Lay Off Workers as Stocks Plummet." The New York Times. 12 March 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/business/economy/coronavirus-airlines-trump-europe.html>

⁷³ Lauren Hirsch. "White House signals third relief bill to help airline and cruise industries hit by coronavirus pandemic." CNBC. 14 March 2020.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/14/white-house-signals-third-relief-bill-to-help-airline-and-cruise-industries-hit-by-coronavirus-pandemic.html>

⁷⁴ Sarah Ferris, et al. "House passes sweeping coronavirus response package." 14 March 2020.

<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/13/congress-coronavirus-stimulus-package-deal-friday-128140>

Next steps

Aid to industry needs guardrails to ensure that it benefits workers rather than those at the top. Congress could put **conditions on executive pay**, such as capping the worker-to-CEO pay ratio for companies that wish to receive assistance.⁷⁵ There should be **restrictions on stock buybacks and dividends for wealthy shareholders**. This is also an opportunity to **close gaps in companies' paid leave policies** and **disincentivize misclassification of workers** as contractors.

Resources

- [Does the Coronavirus Crisis Have to End with a Wealthier Wealthy?](#), Sarah Anderson & Sam Pizzigati, Institute for Policy Studies, Inequality.org

Child care

Background

Child care programs are feeling strained as attendance changes and child care workers need to take leave due to coronavirus. Drops in attendance can reduce payments, which may prevent providers from continuing to operate.⁷⁶

Next steps

Child care programs need **emergency funding** to provide back-up care, cover substitutes, provide additional sanitary supplies and services, and bridge interruptions in payments from parents and caregivers. Direct assistance to programs should be based on enrollment, not attendance. The Department of Health and Human Services should **issue guidance on flexibility for states** under the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Head Start, and Early Head Start programs.

Resources

- [Child Care and Early Learning COVID-19 Stimulus Request](#), National Women's Law Center

Incarcerated population

Background

The 2.3 million people in prison in the U.S. are at especially high risk for coronavirus. Basic preventative measures like hand washing, surface cleaning, and social distancing can be impossible in jails and prisons. Access to hand sanitizers, tissues, and towels is limited. People constantly churn through jails and prisons, providing new opportunities for exposure. Living in close proximity accelerates the spread of illness with a facility. Many inmates are also in high-risk demographics: 40% of inmates suffer from chronic health conditions and the

⁷⁵ Sarah Anderson and Sam Pizzigati. "Does the Coronavirus Crisis Have to End with a Wealthier Wealthy?" Inequality.org. 13 March 2020. <https://inequality.org/great-divide/does-the-coronavirus-crisis-have-to-end-with-a-wealthier-wealthy/>

⁷⁶ National Women's Law Center. "Child Care and Early Learning COVID-19 Stimulus Request." 11 March 2020. <https://nwlc.org/resources/child-care-and-early-learning-covid-19-stimulus-request/>

fastest growing demographic of inmates is those over 55 years old. Health staff could easily get overloaded.⁷⁷

Next steps

The federal government must **ensure jails and prisons are planning for coronavirus**. People who are incarcerated as well as people working at and visiting jails and prisons must be able to take **basic steps to prevent the spread of disease** such as washing hands, using hand sanitizer, and cleaning surfaces.⁷⁸ Prisons should **eliminate medical copays** that discourage inmates from seeking care.

Police should be directed to **avoid putting people into custody** if they do not threaten public safety risk. Parole and probation revocations should also be reduced. Reducing overcrowding and the churn of people in and out of jail will mitigate exposure risk. The prison population should be reduced, with a focus on releasing **older and medically vulnerable individuals**. When possible, people should have alternatives to in-person parole and probation meetings.⁷⁹

Solitary confinement, jail lockdowns, and restricting legal visits are ineffective, harmful tactics to address a coronavirus outbreak. Moving to video options for legal visits and court proceedings could infringe on legal rights.⁸⁰

Resources

- [No need to wait for pandemics: The public health case for criminal justice reform](#), Peter Wagner & Emily Wadra, Prison Policy Initiative
- [Prisons and jails are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 outbreaks](#), The Justice Collaborative

Immigrants

Background

Coronavirus does not check immigration status. However, immigration enforcement practices by the Trump Administration have left immigrants justifiably fearful of seeking medical attention.

The Department of Homeland Security has repeatedly restricted immigration enforcement actions during public health emergencies and natural disasters. However, the Trump Administration refused to do so during Hurricane Maria and the Puerto Rico earthquakes.⁸¹

⁷⁷ The Justice Collaborative. "Prisons and jails are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 outbreaks." 2020. <https://thejusticecollaborative.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TJCVulnerabilityofPrisonsandJailstoCOVID19Explainer.pdf>

⁷⁸ Keri Blackinger and Beth Schwartzapfel. "When Purell is Contraband, How Do You Contain Coronavirus?" The Marshall Project. 6 March 2020. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/03/06/when-purell-is-contraband-how-do-you-contain-coronavirus>

⁷⁹ Peter Wagner and Emily Wadra. "No need to wait for pandemics: The public health case for criminal justice reform." Prison Policy Initiative. 6 March 2020. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/03/06/pandemic/>

⁸⁰ The Justice Collaborative. "Practices to avoid in jails and prisons." 2020. <https://thejusticecollaborative.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TJC-Fact-Sheet-Jails-and-Prisons.pdf>

⁸¹ Claudia Flores, Sofia Carratala, and Tom Jawetz. "DHS Must Suspend Certain Immigration Enforcement Practices During the Coronavirus Outbreak," Center for American Progress. 10 March

Immigrant families have avoided enrolling for Medicaid and CHIP due the Administration's "public charge" rule.⁸²

Detention facilities present the same problems as jails and prisons in terms of overcrowding and poor sanitation that could quickly spread disease.⁸³

Actions so far

Under pressure from Democratic lawmakers, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has said in its coronavirus guidance, "**ICE does not conduct operations at medical facilities**, except under extraordinary circumstances." ICE has suspended personal visitation at detention facilities.⁸⁴

Also after pressures for Democratic lawmakers U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services clarified, "[Coronavirus] **treatment or preventive services will not negatively affect any alien as part of a future Public Charge analysis.**"⁸⁵

Next steps

ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) should **further extend their suspension of enforcement actions** to avoid exacerbating the crisis.

If coronavirus doesn't discriminate based on citizenship, neither can the programs that help contain the spread. The Trump Administration should **stop implementation of the "public charge" rule altogether**, which deters immigrants from seeking medical testing or treatment.⁸⁶ Access to **free testing, treatment, and prevention should be available to all** regardless of immigration status. **Worker protections** should also be extended to immigrant workers.⁸⁷

Any **individuals should be released from overcrowded, unsanitary detention camps** to prevent an even worse humanitarian disaster.⁸⁸

2020.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2020/03/10/481471/dhs-must-suspend-certain-immigration-enforcement-practices-coronavirus-outbreak/>

⁸² Alexandra Villarreal. "Trump's immigration policies may put people at risk of coronavirus – experts," The Guardian. 8 March 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/08/trump-immigration-policies-undocumented-coronavirus>

⁸³ Office of Congressman Jamie Raskin. "Maloney and Raskin Seek Docs from ICE and CBP on Coronavirus Procedures for Detainees." 11 March 2020.

<https://raskin.house.gov/media/press-releases/maloney-and-raskin-seek-docs-ice-and-cbp-coronavirus-procedures-detainees>

⁸⁴ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "ICE guidance on COVID-19." 15 March 2020.

<https://www.ice.gov/covid19>

⁸⁵ U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services. "Public Charge." 13 March 2020.

<https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/public-charge>

⁸⁶ Office of Congresswoman Norma Torres. "Torres Leads 42 Lawmakers in Demanding End to Public Charge Policy." 11 March 2020.

<https://torres.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/torres-leads-42-lawmakers-demanding-end-public-charge-policy>

⁸⁷ National Day Laborer Organizing Network. "Worker & Migrant Justice Response to the Coronavirus." 2020. <https://ndlon.org/worker-migrant-justice-response-to-the-coronavirus/>

⁸⁸ Villarreal 2020

Resources

- [DHS Must Suspend Certain Immigration Enforcement Practices During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#), Center for American Progress
- [Trump's immigration policies may put people at risk of coronavirus – experts](#), The Guardian
- [Worker & Migrant Justice Response to the Coronavirus](#), National Day Laborer Organizing Network
- [Ensure all people \(regardless of immigration status\) have access to care to face the coronavirus pandemic: Sign petition](#), multiple organizations

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Background

The Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) has encountered increased xenophobia during the coronavirus outbreak including discrimination against AAPI businesses, verbal abuse, and physical attacks.⁸⁹ Republican lawmakers have fanned the flames of hate by using terms like “Wuhan virus” and “Chinese coronavirus.”⁹⁰

Actions taken

Leaders of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), Congressional Native American Caucus, and Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) condemned xenophobic statements by Republican lawmakers. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and the CDC have agreed that it's **inappropriate to identify a specific location or country in reference to coronavirus.**⁹¹

Next steps

Coronavirus is no excuse for racism or xenophobia. Public officials should **reject and condemn attacks on Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and others targeted** during this crisis. The federal government should also collect data on xenophobic attacks against the AAPI community.

⁸⁹ National Council of Asian Pacific Americans. “Asian American and Pacific Islander Leaders and Over 260 Civil Rights Organizations Call on Congress to Denounce Anti-Asian Racism around COVID-19,” 11 March 2020. http://www.ncapaonline.org/aapi_leaders_and_over_260_civil_rights_organizations_call_on_congress_to_denounce_anti_asian_racism

⁹⁰ Kimmy Yam. “GOP lawmakers continue to use 'Wuhan virus' or 'Chinese coronavirus.'” 12 March 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/cdc-chief-spurns-term-chinese-coronavirus-used-gop-lawmakers-n1156656>

⁹¹ Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. “Democratic Leaders of Color: McCarthy, Gosar Must Apologize for Spreading Xenophobia and Endangering Asian Americans.” 10 March 2020. <https://capac-chu.house.gov/press-release/democratic-leaders-color-mccarthy-gosar-must-apologize-spreading-xenophobia-and>

Resources

- [Asian American and Pacific Islander Leaders and Over 260 Civil Rights Organizations Call on Congress to Denounce Anti-Asian Racism around COVID-19](#), National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
- [Protecting Asian American and Pacific Islander Working People](#), Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
- [Tell Your Story. Help Us Track Hate.](#), Asian Americans Advancing Justice

Surprise medical bills

Background

Osmel Martinez Azcue showed flu-like symptoms after a business trip and went to a Florida hospital to get tested. He received a \$3,270 bill.⁹²

Frank Wucinski, a Pennsylvania native, and his daughter were quarantined and tested for coronavirus when evacuating from China. He received a \$3,918 bill.⁹³

Two in five Americans don't have \$400 on hand - much less \$4,000 - to cover an unexpected medical bill.⁹⁴ These bills cause stress and financial hardship. Even worse, they can make people who have potentially been exposed hesitant to seek testing and treatment, accelerating the spread of coronavirus.

Next steps

Bipartisan bills advanced by the House Energy & Commerce Committee (Lower Health Care Costs Act of 2019) and House Education & Labor Committee (H.R. 5800, Ban Surprise Billing Act) would put an end to surprise medical bills, ensuring that cost to patients are limited to their in-network rates. Congress should move quickly to pass **surprise billing legislation** similar to those bills and direct the \$24 billion in savings for the federal government into community health centers and other programs that assist at-risk communities.⁹⁵

Resources

- [Surprise Billing Legislation: Side-by-Side Comparison](#), Progressive Caucus Action Fund

⁹² Ben Conarck. "A Miami man who flew to China worried he might have the coronavirus. He may owe thousands." Miami Herald. 24 February 2020.

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/health-care/article240476806.html>

⁹³ Sarah Kliff. "Kept at the Hospital on Coronavirus Fears, Now Facing Large Medical Bills." The New York Times. 2 March 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/29/upshot/coronavirus-surprise-medical-bills.html>

⁹⁴ Soo Youn. "40% of Americans don't have \$400 in the bank for emergency expenses: Federal Reserve." ABC News. 24 May 2019.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/10-americans-struggle-cover-400-emergency-expense-federal/story?id=63253846>

⁹⁵ Progressive Caucus Action Fund. "Surprise Billing Legislation: Side-by-Side Comparison." March 2020. https://progressivecaucusactionfund.org/s/surprise_billing_bill_comparison.pdf

Financial protections

Background

Loss of income from coronavirus will put people at greater risk of missing mortgage payments, rent payments, and other bills.

Next steps

Congress should adopt **protections similar to H.R. 588, the Federal Employees Civil Relief Act**, to protect families from being evicted or foreclosed on, having property repossessed, falling behind on student loan payments, falling behind on bills, or losing insurance due to missed premiums during the coronavirus pandemic.⁹⁶

Resources

- [America's inequitable housing system is completely unprepared for coronavirus](#), Jenny Schuetz, The Brookings Institution

Elections

Background

The coronavirus is hitting in the middle of a presidential primary and could continue through the November election. The majority of poll workers are over 60 years old, the age demographic most at risk from coronavirus.⁹⁷ Failure to take appropriate safety precautions or promote alternatives to in-person voting could reduce voter participation or spread disease.

Georgia has postponed its primary from March 24 to May 19.⁹⁸ Louisiana has postponed its primary from April 4 to June 20. So far, other states are planning to vote as scheduled.⁹⁹ Washington State used mail-in ballots for its March 10 primary so it saw high primary turnout even as it is hit hard by coronavirus.¹⁰⁰ Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, and Utah also mail ballots to all voters. An additional 28 states and DC offer “no-excuse” absentee voting (voter does not have to give a reason to request to vote from home), but voters in those states still have to proactively request an absentee ballot.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Office of Senator Mark R. Warner. “Warner Introduces Legislation to Protect Federal Workers Who Fall Behind on Bills during Trump Shutdown.” 10 January 2019.

<https://www.warner.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2019/1/warner-introduces-legislation-to-protect-federal-workers-who-fall-behind-on-bills-during-trump-shutdown>

⁹⁷ Dale Ho. “How To Protect the Election From Coronavirus.” The New York Times. 12 March 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/opinion/coronavirus-election-vote-mail.html>

⁹⁸ Stephanie Saul. “Georgia Postpones Its Primary as Virus Upends Voting.” The New York Times. 14 March 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/14/us/politics/georgia-primary-virus-2020.html>

⁹⁹ Misyrlena Egkolfopoulou, Mark Niquette, and Magan Crane. “Virus Stokes 2020 Turnout Worries, First Election Is Delayed.” Bloomberg. 13 March 2020.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-13/virus-fears-raise-election-turnout-worries-as-state-delays-votes>

¹⁰⁰ Tucker Higgins. “Coronavirus and the election: Washington state primary voters urged not to lick mail-in ballots.” CNBC. 10 March 2020.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/10/coronavirus-washington-state-democratic-primary-voters-urged-not-to-lick-mail-in-ballots.html>

¹⁰¹ National Conference of State Legislatures. “Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options.” 20 February 2020.

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>

Actions taken

Election officials and candidates are encouraging voters to vote from home or vote early in upcoming primaries. Maryland is considering switching to a vote-by-mail election before its April 28 primary.¹⁰²

Next steps

Voting at home provides the safest, most convenient way for voters to participate in democracy with little risk of exposure to coronavirus. **Voting at home should continue to be promoted and expanded** before Election Day.

H.R. 1, the For the People Act (passed by the House on March 8, 2019), would extend no-excuse absentee voting to all states.

H.R. 6202, the Resilient Elections During Quarantines and Natural Disasters Act of 2020, would require robust vote-at-home options during a disease outbreak or natural disaster. Under the bill, if 25% of states declare an emergency, all states would be required to provide no-excuse absentee voting. Voters would have the choice of submitting ballot requests electronically and printing their ballots at home. Ballot requests would be accepted until 5 days before the election for mailed ballots and the day before for ballots printed at home. The bill would require prepaid, self-sealing envelopes to be provided with mailed ballots. Ballots postmarked by Election Day would be accepted. This bill would also provide \$500 million to states to support implementation.¹⁰³

For in-person voting, polling places should be cleaned thoroughly with **appropriate protections and supplies** in place for election workers, volunteers, and voters. Extending early voting and increasing capacity at polling sites can help **reduce crowds and wait times** that may increase exposure risk.

The November election should not be canceled or postponed due to coronavirus.¹⁰⁴

Resources

- [The Resilient Elections During Quarantines and Natural Disasters Act of 2020](#), Office of Congressman Earl Blumenauer
- [How to Protect the Election From Coronavirus](#), Dale Ho, ACLU's Voting Rights Project, The New York Times
- [Coronavirus Could Get U.S. to Vote by Mail](#), Matt Vasilogambros, The Pew Charitable Trusts

¹⁰² Emily Opilo, Luke Broadwater, and Talia Richman. "Maryland officials considering preparations for election by mail in response to coronavirus outbreak." The Baltimore Sun. 11 March 2020. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-md-pol-ga-coronavirus-maryland-election-vote-mail-20200311-b54b3nqqvfgwthic4ybrtcr4c4-story.html>

¹⁰³ Office of Congressman Earl Blumenauer. "The Resilient Elections During Quarantines and Natural Disasters Act of 2020." 11 March 2020. <https://blumenauer.house.gov/sites/blumenauer.house.gov/files/One%20Pager%20-%20Resilient%20Elections%20During%20Quarantines%20and%20Natural%20Disasters%20Act%20.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ The Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights. "Over 100 Voting Rights Groups: Elections Must Proceed While States Protect Public Health." 14 March 2020. <https://civilrights.org/2020/03/13/voting-rights-groups-elections-must-proceed-while-states-protect-public-health/>

Census

Background

The 2020 Census is emphasizing online and phone submission options with paper forms to follow for nonrespondents in mid-April. Census takers are scheduled to begin follow-up with nonrespondents as early as April 9.¹⁰⁵ Coronavirus could make it harder to reach hard-to-count communities where in-person Census takers are more important to get responses.¹⁰⁶

Actions taken

The Census Bureau has formed a taskforce to monitor the coronavirus situation and make contingency plans to ensure a full count.¹⁰⁷

Next steps

The Census Bureau must regularly review CDC guidance and update its contingency plans as necessary to ensure a thorough count while keeping Census takers and respondents safe. Congress must conduct oversight and be **prepared to provide emergency funds** if the Census Bureau's existing contingency budget is insufficient to adjust to unforeseen circumstances due to coronavirus.

Resources

- [Census Bureau Statement on Coronavirus and the 2020 Census](#), United States Census Bureau

Travel restrictions, quarantines, and social distancing

Background

Travel restrictions, quarantines, and social distancing are all efforts to slow the spread of coronavirus. The World Health Organization has said travel restrictions only make sense at the beginning of an outbreak to give a nation time to prepare. Otherwise, such bans can cause economic and social harm, block needed resources, and delay aid and technical support. Nevertheless, 70 countries, including the U.S., have adopted travel restrictions. President Trump announced a travel ban on Europeans on March 11 after the disease clearly had a foothold in the U.S. already.¹⁰⁸ While unlikely to be effective, the travel ban did cause panic among Europeans and Americans abroad and strain relations with European allies.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ United States Census Bureau. "Census Bureau Statement on Coronavirus and the 2020 Census." 11 March 2020. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/statement-coronavirus.html>

¹⁰⁶ Office of Congressman Jamie Raskin. "Price, Serrano, Maloney, Raskin Press for Answers on Impact of Covid-19 on 2020 Census." 12 March 2020. <https://raskin.house.gov/media/press-releases/price-serrano-maloney-raskin-press-answers-impact-covid-19-2020-census>

¹⁰⁷ United States Census Bureau 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Selam Gebrekidan. "The World Has a Plan to Fight Coronavirus. Most Countries Are Not Using it." The New York Times. 11 March 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/world/coronavirus-world-health-organization.html>

¹⁰⁹ Max Bergmann and Siena Cicarelli. "Why Trump's EU Travel Restrictions Do Not Help To Prevent Coronavirus Outbreak." Center for American Progress. 12 March 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2020/03/12/481713/trumps-eu-travel-restriction-s-not-help-prevent-coronavirus-outbreak/>

Domestic spread of coronavirus has been accelerated by poor information spread by the Trump Administration. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said on March 1, “You really need to just focus on the individuals that are symptomatic.” The Administration has since backtracked on that statement. However, it’s now clear that asymptomatic individuals are a major factor in the virus’s spread.¹¹⁰

The Administration has not given clear direction to federal agencies on telework for federal workers.¹¹¹

Actions taken

In a letter to President Trump, 60 House Democrats criticized the Administration for providing inconsistent information and lacking a clear chain of command.¹¹²

The CDC has now recommended no gathering of more than 50 people for the next two months.¹¹³

Next steps

Government agencies need **staff and leadership** to provide clear and accurate guidance as the disease spreads, correct misinformation, and be held accountable for errors so far.

As the CDC advises social distancing, telework should be encouraged for workers whenever possible. The federal government should lead by example and **direct all federal workers and contractors to telework** unless their physical presence is necessary. (Workers who must be physically present should receive all necessary protections.) The federal government should invest in the equipment, training, and cybersecurity to make telework possible. Non-essential meetings, gatherings, and travel should be postponed with virtual options substituted as much as possible.

Resources

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Why outbreaks like coronavirus spread exponentially, and how to “flatten the curve](#), Harry Stevens, The Washington Post
- [Trump’s False Claims About His Response to the Coronavirus](#), Linda Qiu, The New York Times
- [60 House Dems Demand Improved Coronavirus Response From Trump Administration](#), Office of Congressman Don Beyer

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Cohen. “Infected people without symptoms might be driving the spread of coronavirus more than we realized.” CNN Health. 14 March 2020.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/14/health/coronavirus-asymptomatic-spread/index.html>

¹¹¹ AFGE. “AFGE Calls White House Coronavirus Guidance Inadequate, Urges Congressional Intervention.” 6 March 2020.

<https://www.afge.org/publication/afge-calls-white-house-coronavirus-guidance-inadequate-urges-congressional-intervention/>

¹¹² Office of Congressman Don Beyer 2020

¹¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Get Your Mass Gatherings or Large Community Events Ready.” 14 March 2020.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>

Conclusion

Americans are worried: 83% consider coronavirus a major problem and over half think the worst is yet to come. The majority of Americans do not trust President Trump to address this crisis, and their view of the economy is declining.¹¹⁴

The policies outlined in this document would go a long way toward containing the spread of the virus, mitigating economic harm, restoring public confidence, and reducing the risk in the next public health crisis. And these policies are overwhelmingly supported by the American people. Three in four Americans want free testing and free vaccination, and the majority want free health care. Two-thirds support paid sick and paid family leave.¹¹⁵

Congress has a critical window of opportunity to act. It must seize that opportunity.

¹¹⁴ Navigator Research. "Navigator Special Release: Communicating in Crisis: Coronavirus." 11 March 2020. <https://navigatorresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/March-2020-Navigator-Coronavirus-Special-Release.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Kyle C. Berry, Sean McElwee, and Jason Ganz. "The Care Economy: Policies & Polling on Mitigating the Effects of the Coronavirus." March 2020. <https://www.dataforprogress.org/memos/the-care-economy>