

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Vice President Pence, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy and Leader Schumer:

Our organizations are grateful for the quick passage of the \$8.3 supplemental appropriations bill, the “Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act.” This funding will help state and local public health officials with their response to the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. As the United States faces a sharp increase in community transmission of COVID-19, our organizations recognize that additional actions are needed by the Administration and Congress.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health leaders are currently recommending that individuals confine themselves at home for 14 days if they have been exposed to, or are currently experiencing symptoms of, the novel coronavirus,ⁱ and many states and localities are considering closing or have already closed schools out of an abundance of caution and/or to disinfect facilities. The experience of other countries indicates that aggressive social distancing measures can help slow the spread of the virus. Yet for the 34 million individuals who do not have access to paid sick leave, staying at home may not be a realistic option.ⁱⁱ Many individuals without paid sick time earn low wages and a disproportionate percentage work in the service industry. Just 30 percent of low-wage workers in the private sector have access to paid sick leave, compared to 93 percent of higher-wage workers.ⁱⁱⁱ

The absence of paid sick leave has been linked to or has exacerbated infectious disease outbreaks.^{iv} During the H1N1 pandemic of 2009, an estimated 7 million individuals were infected as a result of contagious coworkers not staying home from work when ill.^v Further exacerbating employee pressure to report to work is the fact that only three out of every 10 American adults have emergency savings that they could tap if forced to stay home without paid leave.^{vi} These kinds of inequities and vulnerabilities raise serious consequences for families, and for the economy as a whole.

While short-term steps are needed to address the current challenges, additional action is needed to ensure that paid sick days and other economic supports are readily available to all Americans, regardless of their socioeconomic status. **We, the signatory organizations, strongly encourage the Administration and Congress to do the following:**

- Pass and implement federal paid sick days legislation that would provide the following benefits to all individuals:
 - Require all employers, regardless of their size, to allow workers to gradually earn seven days of paid sick leave for permanent use for personal/family illnesses and preventive care;
 - Include an additional 14 days of paid sick leave immediately available at the beginning of a public health emergency with no accrual or waiting period (this aligns with the current quarantine time for COVID-19);
 - Offer tax relief or interest-free loans to small businesses that provide paid sick leave benefits under a public health emergency;
 - Allow for leave to be taken if schools or places of employment close in response to a public health emergency;
 - Allow for leave to care for family members; and
 - Protect workers from facing job-loss or other reprisal if they comply with public health or medical advice to stay home.

- Consider how to provide financial assistance to small businesses and employees impacted by the novel coronavirus. Potential opportunities may include but are not limited to:
 - Clarify that disaster loans for small businesses, authorized by the recent supplemental legislation, can be used to cover the costs of implementing paid sick days and/or temporarily closing or otherwise complying with public health guidance.
 - The President should declare an emergency declaration for an infectious disease event under the Stafford Act that can enable the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide relief funding to state and local governments, as well as federal assistance directly to individuals or organizations as part of the Individual Assistance and Public Assistance programs.

Responding effectively to COVID-19 is a responsibility we all share, and there is much that the Administration and Congress can do to follow the guidance of public health officials and make it possible for residents and employees to do likewise. These commonsense approaches may incur a short-term cost but will save lives and curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus. Economies can recover; without adequate protections, individuals and families may not.

American Lung Association
American Medical Student Association
American Public Health Association
American School Health Association
American Sexual Health Association
American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, George Washington University
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Center for Global Health Science and Security Georgetown University
Center for Public Policy Priorities
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Children's Environmental Health Network
Clean Habitat Inc.
Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Florida Institute for Health Innovation
Georgetown University Center for Global Health Science and Security
Green & Healthy Homes Initiative
Health Resources in Action
HIV Medicine Association
Immunize Nevada
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Liver Health Initiative
March of Dimes
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of School Nurses
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Council of Jewish Women
National Fragile X Foundation
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Organization for Women
Nerds Rule Inc.
NW Unangax Culture
NYU School of Global Public Health
PATH
Peggy Lillis Foundation
People's Action
Prevention Institute
Public Health Institute
Public Health Solutions
Rollins School of Public Health
Safe States Alliance
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Society for Public Health Education
Sumner M Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness
Trust for America's Health
Washington Public Health Association
Washington State Department of Health

Women's Law Project

- ⁱ Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Communities. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>
- ⁱⁱ Paid Sick Days Quick Facts. National Partnership for Women & Families. <http://www.paid sick days.org/research-resources/quick-facts.html#XmaXZahKiU>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Leave Benefits Access, Private Sector Workers. Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 2019. <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/ownership/private/table31a.pdf>
- ^{iv} Ready or Not: Protecting the Public's Health from Diseases, Disasters and Bioterrorism. Trust for America's Health, 2020. <https://www.tfah.org/report-details/readyornot2020/>
- ^v Drago R, Miller K. Sick at work: infected employees in the workplace during the H1N1 epidemic. Available at: <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/sick-at-work-infected-employees-in-the-workplace-during-the-h1n1-pandemic>
- ^{vi} Pesce, NL. A shocking number of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. Marketwatch, Jan 2020. <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/a-shocking-number-of-americans-are-living-paycheck-to-paycheck-2020-01-07>