



August 12, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Democratic Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Treasury Secretary Mnuchin, and White House Chief of Staff Meadows:

As national leaders in health, housing, nutrition, and labor, we urge Congress to pass and the President to sign a COVID-19 relief package that mitigates the devastation that millions of families — especially Black and Brown families — face, which are fueled by the dual health and economic impacts of COVID-19. By taking immediate action to provide income, housing, health care, and nutrition support to struggling families, Congress and the Administration can provide desperately needed comprehensive assistance so that families can weather the current economic crisis while simultaneously investing in relief measures that will jump-start the economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic is devastating working families across the country. COVID-19 is attacking not just our health, but also our economic security and well-being. Low-income people, particularly Black and Brown families, are being harmed in staggering numbers. Black people are [four times](#) more likely to die from the virus than White people and more likely to face [unemployment](#). According to an [analysis by University of California, Los Angeles](#), if Native American tribes were counted as states, the five most infected states in the country would all be native tribes. A recent [analysis by UnidosUS](#), highlights that Latinos make up 35 percent of all COVID-19 cases for which race and ethnicity data are available, but only 18.5 percent of the total U.S. population. The events of the past five months have laid bare the structural obstacles and racist roots of our policies and safety net systems. Congress and the Administration have an opportunity to shift course, invest in what matters, save lives, and govern our country toward equity and justice for all, not just some.

With that in mind, we urge you to reject the lopsided policies embedded in the HEALS Act, which privilege the economic security of the wealthy and corporations while ignoring the needs of ordinary people. Furthermore, the Administration's limited and harmful Executive Orders issued over this past weekend fail to respond to the gravity of the current crisis. Instead, Congressional leaders and the Administration must continue to work for a package that responds to the needs of people struggling across the country. Congress must pass a bill now that addresses the twin health and economic crises of millions of hard-hit communities by providing income, housing, health care, and food security relief. The specific measures outlined below will help people and our nation weather the current economic crisis while work continues to bring the virus under control. This is not an either-or proposition — our country needs a whole-person, whole-family, whole-community approach that meets this unprecedented moment.

1. **People need financial security now.** Families need financial support to meet basic needs. Congress must continue the \$600 supplemental funding in weekly unemployment payments, helping people cope with the devastating effects of job loss and fears around returning to work with chronic illness or caregiving demands. People of color are more likely to receive bills for care they cannot afford, [less likely to have paid leave](#), and more likely to [lose their jobs](#) as a result of the economic crisis that COVID-19 is causing. Reducing the \$600 supplemental funding

diminishes the purchasing power of families in the midst of a severe economic crisis, which is shortsighted and will intensify our economic contraction.

2. **People need health security now.** Medicaid is the backbone of our nation's health care safety net. Medicaid is the health care program best positioned to respond to this crisis and is also a tool to advance equity, ensuring that all people have access to the health care they need, including an estimated [5 million essential and frontline workers](#) who rely on Medicaid for their health coverage. Further, because of our nation's history of employment discrimination, Black people and other people of color are more likely to rely on Medicaid as their source of health coverage. Also, funding Medicaid ensures that older Americans and people with disabilities and the workers who care for them are able to stay safe, healthy, and live with dignity. Without support for Medicaid, the ability of people to receive care at home and in their communities is at grave risk. The ability of states to maintain their Medicaid programs is jeopardized by rising enrollment coupled with state revenue shortfalls, which are both linked to the pandemic. States already face an estimated \$555 billion in revenue shortfalls; [since February, 1.5 million public servants have been laid off](#). The limited federal relief provided to date does not come close to meeting the needs of states and localities, nor does the HEALS Act include support for Medicaid or broad fiscal relief that address states' needs to fund multiple priorities, including social services and the increasing demand for health insurance coverage. The two are tied together and work together to rebuild our economy by keeping state services running and ensuring people can stay healthy so they can be active participants in an economic recovery. We must not force states to choose between basic services and providing health access during a pandemic. Providing robust funding for state and local aid by at least \$1 trillion and enhancing and extending Medicaid FMAP funding at least through 2021 is a dual investment in our state and local economies while protecting the health of those harmed most by the pandemic.
3. **People need housing security now.** We know that good health and stability are rooted in housing. According to the latest [research](#), 30–40 million renters could be evicted by the end of the year. This would leave millions of renters at risk of homelessness, including millions of young children. The data regarding hardship among renters are stark. Black, Indigenous, and other people of color who are also renters are more likely to fall behind on rent and have a more difficult time making ends meet than White renters — notably, about 7 million children, according to census data, live in households that are behind on rent. According to a public opinion poll conducted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition's [Opportunity Starts at Home](#) campaign, a broad-based coalition, 61 percent of households that earn less than \$40,000 say they are concerned that they will lose their housing without additional support. These are the voices of our families. The inequity stemming from racist policies around housing, education, employment, and health care shape a fragile reality for these families. In the next relief bill, Congress must provide at least \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance through the “Emergency Rental Assistance and Rental Market Stabilization Act” and housing vouchers; enact a uniform nationwide eviction moratorium to cover all renters; and provide at least \$11.5 billion to assist people already experiencing homelessness. In combination, [these solutions](#) are critical for supporting housing stability during the pandemic and for promoting good health among the population.

4. **People need food security now.** Investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's (SNAP) benefit levels are essential to help promote food security and health and to jump start economic recovery. During COVID-19, the rate of food insecurity has reached crisis levels: 1 in 4 adults are struggling to put enough food on the table. Not surprisingly, those households that lack food access are the same families that face inequities in housing, employment, and education — approximately [4 in 10 Black and Hispanic households with children](#) are now struggling to feed their families. Food insecurity has serious health repercussions across the lifespan, including negatively impacting the ability of children to develop and learn as well as fueling costly and chronic health conditions. Like Medicaid, SNAP is a proven stimulus tool that can play a dual role in meeting basic nutritional needs and stimulating the economy. Decades of research demonstrate the effectiveness of SNAP in alleviating poverty; reducing food insecurity; improving the health, nutrition, and well-being of children, adults, and seniors; and reducing health care utilization and costs. [Boosting](#) maximum and minimum SNAP benefits during the current downturn would help millions of Americans struggling with food insecurity, housing instability, and diminished wages, and would jump-start our nation's economic recovery. Every \$1 in SNAP benefits in a downturn generates between \$1.50 to \$1.80 in economic activity. Congress must strengthen SNAP by boosting the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent and increasing the monthly minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30. Feeding our families is a priority — no one should be hungry.

We urge you to return to the negotiating table to deliver a COVID-19 relief package that provides the investments in vital human needs and boosts to our economy that our country needs now more than ever. The HEALS Act and the current Executive Orders fall woefully short of this goal. Congress and the Administration must do better and act now. The people of this country are counting on you to meet the moment with the boldness and compassion that it demands.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Community Catalyst  
Food Research & Action Center  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
Service Employees International Union