



April 14, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer,

The implementation of the recently-passed Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act will offer much-needed health protections and economic relief for millions of people across the country. At the same time, as the coronavirus crisis deepens, we urgently need a CARES 2.0 to bridge outstanding gaps in critical relief and equitably protect workers, communities, and our democracy.

As the coronavirus crisis intensifies, many workers and communities are grappling with unacceptable health risks and escalating economic insecurity. The crisis is magnifying longstanding structural inequities, as our country's most marginalized people face particularly large threats. Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities are getting sick and dying at alarming and disproportionate rates. Nurses in under-served hospitals are working without masks and other essential protective equipment. Immigrants are going without paychecks. Families with low income are facing water and utility shutoffs and heightened levels of food and housing insecurity. Just as this crisis is exacerbating inequity, our response must do the opposite. We need a CARES 2.0 that prioritizes the needs of the workers and communities on the front lines.

Meanwhile, we urgently need to do more to safeguard our democracy in this critical election year. That need was on full display in Wisconsin as long lines of people were shamefully forced to risk their health to vote. We need a CARES 2.0 that ensures people can safely exercise their democratic rights.

Finally, we need to ensure that all industry assistance in response to the crisis includes strong conditions to support workers and communities, not corporate executives. Since signing the CARES Act into law, Donald Trump has consistently worked to eliminate independent oversight of the bill's big business bailouts. We need a CARES 2.0 that ties all existing and forthcoming industry assistance to ironclad conditions to ensure effective oversight, support for family-sustaining jobs, and business practices that support a transition to a more equitable, clean energy economy.

To uphold these priorities, a CARES 2.0 package should:

**Bridge gaps in health and economic protections**

- Access to water, electricity, and heating: Enact a nationwide moratorium on shutoffs of water and electricity for the duration of the crisis. Fund costs for utilities to restore and maintain water service for homeowners and renters, tied to provisions that prohibit water shutoffs and establish mandatory safe water reconnections (including for households disconnected prior to the crisis), as well as lenient repayment plans, debt forgiveness, and affordable rate structures. In addition, the Low Income Home

Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) should be funded well above the authorized levels for low-income electricity bill assistance and weatherization, with increased capacity for state and local administrators to distribute resources efficiently and effectively.

- Worker protections: Grant paid sick leave and paid family medical leave for all workers, without exceptions. An emergency occupational safety standard for all frontline workers should also be enacted. In addition, funding should be earmarked specifically for masks, ventilators, and personal protective equipment for health workers.
- Fairness for immigrants: Broaden eligibility requirements to ensure that all taxpayers, including immigrants, benefit from all existing and forthcoming coronavirus-related health and economic benefits (including the rebate checks in the CARES Act and the testing and treatment benefits in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act). Work authorizations also should be extended for recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS).
- Addressing racial disparities: Collect and publish demographic data to accurately determine the level of coronavirus impacts on under-served communities and communities of color, and direct needed resources to them immediately. In Michigan and Illinois — two of the earliest states to produce such data — African Americans account for about a third of coronavirus cases and about 40 percent of deaths, even though that demographic only makes up 15 and 14 percent, respectively, of the states' total populations. In addition, vaccine research should take into account the virus's reportedly disproportionate impact on men.
- Affordable housing: Enact a nationwide moratorium on all foreclosures and evictions (not just for federally-backed mortgages). In addition, tens of billions of dollars in rental assistance are needed to ensure housing stability for low-income renters.
- Nutrition access: Increase investments in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). While the CARES Act includes funding for SNAP administration, it does not include needed investments to increase SNAP benefits and expand eligibility. Additional investments in SNAP are needed, including a 15 percent boost to the maximum benefit and an increase in the minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$30, with food purchases directed to support family farmers. The five-year waiting period for legal permanent residents should be eliminated, and investments in Disaster SNAP should be expanded.

### **Safeguard our democracy**

While Congress put a \$400 million down payment on needed election reforms in the CARES Act, CARES 2.0 must offer at least \$3.6 billion more to help states implement comprehensive changes, which must include:

- An extended early in-person voting period (allowing for voters to come in over a spread-out period rather than in a cluster on election day)
- No-excuse absentee voting-by-mail (including a number of options through which to request and return ballots, and elimination of state voter ID laws that require picture ID's as part of an absentee ballot application)
- Expanded voter registration options (including online voter registration and same-day voter registration)
- Prohibition of polling place adjustments that disproportionately impact vulnerable populations (such as people of color, Indigenous people, limited-English proficient citizens, people with disabilities, and students)
- Voter education (informing the public of new practices and immediately quashing disinformation)
- Ballot tracking for both election officials and voters to ensure a secure election

### **Rescue workers and communities, not corporate executives**

All financial assistance to industries included in the original CARES Act, and in any forthcoming coronavirus-related packages, should be subject to these requirements:

- **Strong oversight standards**, including:
  - Eliminating the ability of the Secretary of Treasury to waive conditions placed on financial assistance to industries
  - A moratorium on executive bonuses, stock buybacks, shareholder dividends, and corporate tax cuts for benefitting companies for the duration of the assistance, plus at least one year
  - Authorizing Congress and independent overseers to have oversight of financial assistance to industries in real time (not merely via after-the-fact reporting)
- **Strong environmental standards**, including:
  - Requirements for benefitting companies to cut greenhouse gas emissions and toxic pollution
  - A prohibition on benefitting companies using the financial assistance for fossil fuel investments
  - An explicit statement that the oil and gas industry is not eligible to receive financial support of any kind (including loans, loan guarantees, tax subsidies, suspension or reduction of royalty fees, or purchases into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve), except for funds specifically to support safety, economic relief, and transition for fossil fuel workers. In addition, no fossil fuel sector should receive an “essential industry” exemption.
- **Strong equity standards**, including requirements for benefitting companies to:
  - Use hiring preferences for low-income workers, people of color, and returning citizens
  - Use contracting preferences for businesses led by women and people of color
  - Adopt a “ban the box” hiring policy to ensure fair employment opportunities for all
  - Make jobs accessible to undocumented immigrants, paired with a federal moratorium on deportations and a path to citizenship for those workers
  - Use community benefit agreements for all construction and related contracts
- **Strong labor standards**, including requirements for benefitting companies to:
  - Maintain payroll and benefits for all workers
  - Adopt a neutrality policy with regard to union collective bargaining
  - Offer paid sick leave and paid family medical leave to all employees and contractors
  - Enact essential safety measures for all employees
  - Enable worker representation on the company’s board of directors
  - Enact a company-wide policy of a \$15/hour or higher minimum wage
  - Use Davis Bacon prevailing wages and project labor agreements for all construction and related contracts

The Sierra Club stands ready to work with Congress to pass a CARES 2.0 package that upholds the above priorities for equitably protecting workers, communities, and our democracy. After securing these urgently-needed protections, we also look forward to working with Congress to enact the bold stimulus measures that are needed to put millions of unemployed people back to work in family-sustaining jobs while charting a path toward a healthier and more equitable economy. We appreciate your ongoing work to ensure immediate relief and long-term recovery from the COVID-19 crisis for all people.

Sincerely,



Michael Brune  
Executive Director  
Sierra Club