



March 23, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader U.S.
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Economic Relief and Recovery for COVID-19 impacts

Dear House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer:

Before the first COVID-19 case in the United States, millions of Americans in low-income communities and communities of color *already* faced massive barriers standing between them and the American Dream. Communities that disproportionately suffered from pollution-induced illness and health conditions are now more likely to become seriously ill. People caught up in our mass incarceration system face the crisis locked in cells in dangerous conditions. Catastrophic economic consequences could further impact disadvantaged people who are locked out of the economy of the future. This situation could now grow much worse.

The “Families First Coronavirus Response Act” was a good first step. But at this moment, the question is whether the outbreak exacerbates the disparities in America, or if our response brings millions of people closer to dignity and freedom for all.





Without further action, countless families will be unable to pay their bills and meet basic needs like housing, healthcare, food, and childcare -- and they could face the repercussions for decades. We thus urge you to prioritize the following principles:

1. **Target relief for people and workers who need it most, especially communities of color and low-income communities.**
2. **Build long-term economic resilience for low-income and disadvantaged communities.**
3. **Invest in companies, programs, and industries that reduce pollution.**

The immediate and long-term needs are outlined below. Detailed descriptions are in the attached [appendices](#):

Immediate response:

1. Ensure direct relief payments reach ALL low and moderate-income households.
2. Stop evictions, foreclosures and utility shut-offs.
3. Slow job losses and support small businesses, non-profits, and non-traditional workers.
4. Protect public health.
5. Preserve the right to vote.
6. Keep public transit running.
7. Provide dignity and safety for people who are incarcerated and ensure that they maintain regular communication with their families and support networks.
8. End unnecessary pre-trial detention and the incarceration of vulnerable communities, such as senior citizens, in order to lessen the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
9. Address the “homework gap.”
10. Bailout people and workers, not executives and shareholders.

Large-scale, longer-term investments:

Foster **job creation and innovation** through investments in an equitable, clean energy economy for all that include:

1. **Energy and transportation** solutions that provide good jobs and reduce pollution.
2. **Affordable housing** located near good jobs and essential services.





3. A **workforce** that is diverse, highly-trained, and ready to advance the growing sectors of healthcare, clean transportation, and clean energy.
4. **Comprehensive** education and vocational programs which allow incarcerated persons to achieve full employment and end the cycle of recidivism.

In conclusion, the disadvantaged communities that will be hurt worst by this crisis make up the base of support of both parties, and so both parties have a vested interest in coming together to identify common ground that helps these vulnerable people and not the well-connected or already-powerful. COVID-19 does not care about someone's party affiliation. As Americans turn to help each other across party lines, we expect the same from our leaders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nisha Anand".

Nisha Anand
CEO, Dream Corps

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Appendix I: Immediate response:

These immediate priorities are equity-focused and targeted at building an economy that works for all people.

1. Ensure direct relief payments reach ALL low and moderate-income households.

Restricting direct relief payments to households who filed a 2018 tax return excludes many vulnerable workers and households. While excluding wealthy taxpayers from direct relief payments serves efficiency and effectiveness objectives and the IRS can apply this restriction through its payment system, additional direct payment systems are needed to ensure these payments reach those who need it most.

- In addition to the IRS payments that should apply to filers with either a SSN or ITIN, direct payments should also be immediately dispersed through SNAP benefits cards and Social Security, SSI, and VA benefits.
- For people who have not filed taxes and are not part of these programs, there should be an extremely simple and easy way for people to request their payment and for community organizations to help people file for and receive their relief payment.

2. Stop evictions, foreclosures and utility shut-offs.

- Provide federal funding to support:
 - states and cities that are issuing broad moratoriums on eviction, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs and are increasing emergency income assistance.
 - emergency rental assistance and other protections for renters, and
 - sanitation, health and safety measures for low-income and public housing.
- Provide dignity and safety for people who are unsheltered.
 - Halt criminalization of homelessness.
 - Increase funding for rapid rehousing, shelters and other programs.
 - Provide emergency funding for the creation of additional housing options.
 - Convert publicly owned empty housing into shelter space.

3. Slow job losses and support small businesses, non-profits, and non-traditional workers.

- **Small businesses.** Fund the Small Business Administration to directly deploy interest-free loans to small businesses impacted by COVID-19 to provide employee benefits, pay wages, make alternative operating plans, and pay rent.
- **Non-profits.** America's charitable nonprofits employ over 12 million people and provide essential services throughout the country. All relief or stimulus legislation should



expressly address the needs of nonprofits and provide additional support for community-based non-profits.

- Make tax credits and deductions applicable not just to income taxes, but to the taxes nonprofits pay, such as payroll taxes.
- Address the unique needs of nonprofits in the areas of unemployment insurance, employee retention, and risk insurance.
- In order to ensure community-based and charitable organizations can continue to serve our communities, Congress should allocate emergency stimulus funding aimed at helping adversely affected national and local organizations, including through the rapid expansion of the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program for nonprofit employers and emergency grants to nonprofits operating under grants from federal, state, local, or other pass-through entities.
- **Non-traditional workers.** Immediately fund an unemployment protection fund for the self-employed and gig workers, which would allow them to draw down benefits in the event of declining income due to decreased demand. Appropriate funds for a Self-Employment Assistance Fund within Economic Adjustment Assistance and Disaster Relief Loan programs, and require agencies to quickly issue guidance enabling the self-employed to access these programs.

4. **Protect public health.**

Increase coverage of **paid sick and family medical leave** to be universal and immediately available regardless of COVID-19 diagnosis. Working while sick with non-COVID-19 conditions increases infection risk, especially for medically vulnerable populations.

- **Take the following actions to support people to stay home safely.**
 - Require all companies, including those larger than 500 employees to provide at least 2 weeks paid sick leave available immediately, regardless of accruals or company policy.
 - Include all contractors, sub-contractors and gig-workers in coverage requirements.
 - Provide immediate funding to companies that face economic hardship, in line with funding outlined in S. 3513, the "PAID Leave Act."
 - Due to the shortage of tests and the fast-moving nature of the pandemic, COVID-19 testing should not be a requirement for workers to qualify to use sick leave.
 - Guarantee emergency pay for anyone who needs to quarantine due to suspected infection, and paid family and medical sick leave for up to three months.
- **Provide medical care to all affected individuals regardless of ability to pay.**



- Provide free COVID-19 tests and free medical care for all COVID-19 patients, including for undocumented people, the homeless, and the incarcerated.
 - Prioritize testing and access to care for people in nursing homes, assisted living centers, and rehabilitation and mental health facilities.
 - Escalate international cooperation to share effective strategies for care, including medical treatment. Work with other nations to rapidly develop a COVID-19 vaccine that can be shared globally.
 - Provide free COVID-19 vaccinations when the vaccine is available.
- 5. Preserve the right to vote.** Include measures from the “Resilient Elections During Quarantines and Natural Disasters Act of 2020” and require states and localities to create and publish contingency plans to operate elections during a time of large scale quarantine for poll workers and/or voters. Require states to offer registered voters the ability to vote by absentee ballot, offer voters the choice of receiving their blank absentee ballot electronically to print at home and return by postal mail, and allow ballots that have been postmarked by election day.
- 6. Keep public transit running.** Maintain essential mobility services, especially for medically and economically vulnerable populations and essential personnel like emergency workers. Ensure that transit agencies have the information and funding they need to follow sanitation and safety guidelines specified by health agencies. Make up for transit agencies’ lost revenues that have resulted from increased telecommuting and COVID-19-related restrictions.
- 7. Provide dignity and safety for people who are incarcerated and ensure that they maintain regular communication with their families and support networks.** Require and fund adequate planning for preparing jails and prisons for COVID-19 outbreaks and ensure that this especially-vulnerable population is equipped with adequate resources and information. In facilities where physical visitation is suspended, retain or enhance access to non-contact legal visitation and provide alternative methods for family visitation. In addition, ensure that incarcerated persons have adequate access to necessary medications, cleaning supplies, and hygiene products, as well as access to educational and rehabilitative programming which help combat recidivism and may result in sentence reductions.

Should the federal or state government turn to the use of prison labor at this time, the federal government should support policies that:

- Provide safe working conditions and routinely sanitized work spaces.
- Increase compensation for these workers.



- **Communication.** Social distancing policies are severely limiting the ability of incarcerated people to communicate with their families. The federal government should support policies which:
 - Ensure access to telephone communications for persons incarcerated. If feasible, such communication should be at low or not cost for the duration of the crisis.
 - Provide sufficient postage, writing materials, and envelopes for mail communication.
 - Where feasible, ensure regular access to video conferencing at little or no cost.
 - **Information.** To increase the flow of information regarding COVID-19 inside prisons and jails, and prevent additional cases, the federal government should support policies which:
 - Provide key health information addressing the following topics via prison television stations, flyers, medical staff, and local radio stations:
 - Information on COVID-19: what it is, how it is transmitted, symptoms, risk groups, guidance for minimizing risk
 - Instructions on what to do if feeling ill and what actions will be taken by the institution (including, but not limited to, testing, where people will be housed, and restrictions)
 - Instruct medical staff and the warden of each facility to share facility-specific updates daily to the representatives from each unit or cell block following each daily update. This information should also be made available to people with limited or no English, to those who are non-readers, and to those with disabilities.
 - **Prevention & Treatment.** *In order to combat the spread of COVID-19 and provide the best possible care for incarcerated Americans, the federal government should support policies which:*
 - Provide protective equipment and training to all who participate in the preparation or distribution of food or other goods, like laundry and supplies.
 - Provide sanitizing wipes at landline phone stations to reduce virus transmission.
 - Provide 30-day supplies of medications to reduce contact and staff workload.
 - Provide low density daily access to the yard for anyone who is not ill.
 - Provide access to showers every at least 48 hours, and conduct regular cleanings.
 - House those who are deemed medically high risk in single cells only.
8. **Access to Medical Staff:** In order to ensure prisoners continued access to medical professionals, the federal government should support policies that:



- Require that a medical professional accompanies staff during daily count times, and has authority to take necessary medical actions regarding an at-risk person, person exhibiting symptoms, and an infected person.
- 9. Address the “Homework Gap.”** Fund and establish a mobile hotspot grant program that would provide grants to eligible institutions to facilitate mobile hotspot programs that would provide a hotspot device (that is portable, does not contain a data limitation and complies with the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998) to enrolled students, or the family or guardian of such enrolled students.
- 10. Bailout people and workers, not executives and shareholders.** Build a clean energy economy that works for people.
- Strong bailout conditions for any government assistance to companies should include paid sick leave, worker protections, requirements to keep people on the payroll, and for applicable industries, commitments to reduce emissions.
 - Investments for severely distressed businesses should be targeted at companies that are both labor-intensive and part of the clean energy economy, such as suppliers and installers of renewable energy, energy efficiency, electric vehicles and equipment, and other durable infrastructure.
 - Government assistance should not be wasted on oil purchases or royalty relief for capital-intensive companies that primarily benefit shareholders and executives.



Appendix II: Large-scale, longer-term investments:

1. **Transportation:** Prioritize mobility options that are affordable, low or zero-emission, and serve communities that need them the most, including:
 - **Public transit.** Increase funding for the Federal Transit Administration grants to enhance transit service coverage, reliability, and frequency and to reduce emissions through cleaner technologies, including electrification
 - **School buses.** Fund programs to retire the dirtiest school buses first and replace them with electric buses. Encourage innovation to increase multi-purpose utilization of bus batteries, (i.e. electric grid services or community programs) to maximize return on investment.
 - **Other electric vehicles.** Fund programs that help state, local and community service organizations purchase electric vehicles. Provide on the hood rebates for new and used plug-in and efficient vehicles.
 - **Infrastructure.** Increase funding and redirect infrastructure investments towards cleaner technologies (especially electrification), and require all transportation infrastructure proposals to include an evaluation of programs based on:
 - Reduction of pedestrian deaths
 - Reduction of carbon pollution and criteria emissions
 - Job creation, especially for people from disadvantaged communities, and
 - Increase in mobility choice for people from disadvantaged communities and for people with disabilities or limited mobility.

2. **Affordable Energy and Housing**
 - Increase funding for **home weatherization** (DOE's Weatherization Assistance Program) and **energy efficiency**, particularly for multifamily housing and government-subsidized housing and for low-income homeowners.
 - Increase funding for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (**LIHEAP**) to help households pay their electric and gas bills.
 - **Increase supply of affordable housing**
 - Provide funding, incentives, and faster permitting to stimulate the construction of affordable housing units, especially in high cost regions and neighborhoods accessible to transit and other mobility options, good jobs, and essential services, in line with H.R.1737/S 787 "American Housing and Economic Mobility Act of 2019."



- Increase investments in the national Housing Trust Fund to build and operate rental housing affordable for people with the lowest incomes, including people experiencing homelessness.
- Prevent eviction and homelessness by funding housing stabilization through an emergency assistance fund in line with the bipartisan “Eviction Crisis Act.”

3. Jobs and Workforce Development

- **Good, green jobs.** Increase funding for programs to train workers for careers in clean transportation, energy efficiency and renewable energy fields, prioritizing the cultivation of local talent for high-wage, high growth potential jobs in disadvantaged communities.
- Ramp up the path to train the **healthcare workforce** that is desperately needed in the coming years and ensure that it includes talented people from disadvantaged backgrounds. A bipartisan bill such as S.1117, the “Gateway to Careers Act of 2019” could be targeted at the healthcare sector and provide critical support for people who have potential to excel in healthcare roles that are facing worsening skills shortages, but need support such as child care, transportation, and career counseling to complete career pathways programs and secure in-demand credentials.
- **Spend federal dollars on good jobs.** Incentivize companies, contractors, and any jobs created through direct federal procurement dollars to ensure workers are provided adequate paid sick leave, health care coverage, and other benefits through high-roads agreements and labor standards, including community workforce agreements to create opportunities for local residents and disadvantaged workers.
- **Invest in workers for today and tomorrow.** Increase funding to workforce programs that serve low-income communities and disadvantaged communities. Expand Trade Adjustment Assistance program to cover more workers who lose their jobs due to market, industrial, or broad economic changes and support them as they retool and retrain to thrive in growing economic sectors.