

NETWORK Lobby COVID-19 Legislative Priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic is a moral challenge and our nation's response will reveal our values. Right now, Congress faces one question: **Do we value people over profits?**

Our country's fourth coronavirus response package must prioritize human needs programs, ensure funding to care for vulnerable members of our society, and protect public health. The grave challenges facing the United States and the world are unprecedented and require a bold and compassionate response.

The Reality of the Pandemic

For over 40 years, our advocacy has been rooted in the lived realities of individuals and families on the social and economic margins. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the ways our federal government has failed to structure a society that cares for those most in need.

The truth is that our lack of preparedness and the current deluge of unmet need is due as much to the chronic, willful dismantling of our social safety net as it is to the failings of the current Administration.

In counties and states across the U.S, the COVID-19 pandemic has indiscriminately brought communities to a precipice. Still, racial disparities in mortality data show that Black and Latinx individuals are disproportionately contracting the virus and dying.¹ Native American communities are also especially vulnerable to the threat of COVID-19.² These outcomes are undeniably connected to the racial discrimination, structural inequities in access to health care, narrow work opportunities, and housing disparities people of color experience.³

We applaud Congress's quick and bold actions to address the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic so far. But, much more remains for Congress to do to address alarming disparities now emerging across racial and economic divides.

Our Values

- Catholic Social Justice teaches us to uphold the dignity of each person as an equally valuable member of the human family.
- Honoring human dignity means prioritizing public health and providing health care for all.
- We are called to act in solidarity with people and communities experiencing poverty who are particularly vulnerable to economic impacts of COVID-19.
- In our secular democracy, the right to vote must be protected and ensured as a sacred right.

1. Vox, "COVID-19's devastating toll on Black and Latino Americans, in one chart"
<https://www.vox.com/2020/4/17/21225610/us-coronavirus-death-rates-blacks-latinos-whites>
2. Washington Post, "Indian Country, where residents suffer disproportionately from disease, is bracing for coronavirus"
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/04/04/native-american-coronavirus/>
3. Washington Post, "4 reasons coronavirus is hitting Black communities so hard"
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/04/10/4-reasons-coronavirus-is-hitting-black-communities-so-hard/>

Priorities for Future COVID-19 Relief Legislation

Access to Democracy: *Guarantee and invest in safe and fair elections*

- **Provide \$4 billion for the Election Assistance Commission** to uphold safe and secure elections.
- **Fund the United States Postal Service** to ensure necessary voting infrastructure is in place.
- **Waive restrictions on Help America Vote Act (HAVA) election grants** to remove barriers to funding.

Family-Friendly Workplace Policies: *Enforce workers' right to paid leave*

- **Close paid leave loopholes** that allow corporations with over 500 employees and certain health care companies to abstain from providing their employees paid leave under current law.

Access to Health Care: *Make health care available to all during COVID-19*

- **Increase funding for Medicaid** including a 12% increase in Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) to help states, localities, and tribes respond.
- **Expand Medicaid eligibility to all** regardless of insurance or citizenship status.
- **Provide an additional \$8 billion for Community Health Centers (CHCs)** on the frontlines of providing care for vulnerable populations.

Access to Housing: *Affirm housing is a human right by meeting elevated need*

- **Provide \$11.5 billion in Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding** to help respond to urgent need.
- **Implement a 6-month moratorium on foreclosures and evictions** to alleviate immediate housing concerns.
- **Provide \$100 billion in additional renter's assistance** to help renters along with the moratorium.

Immigrant Communities: *Extend pandemic assistance and reject policies that harm immigrants*

- **Remove Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) exclusions** and provide recovery rebates to millions of mixed-status families left out.
- **Protect immigrant workers** by strengthening labor protections and automatically extending work authorization for those impacted by filing delays.
- **Reject funds for immigration enforcement and procedures and regulations** that impair communities' access to vital public services.

Nutrition: *Prioritize food security for households across the nation*

- **Increase SNAP benefits by 15%** providing a much-needed boost for households with limited means.
- **Reject rules that decrease food access** proposed by the Trump administration.

Livable Income: *Plan for the future by extending unemployment benefits*

- **Enact a tiered system of expanded UI and PUA benefits** tied to the health of the economy.
- **Provide \$10 billion to state unemployment insurance agencies** to assist with backlog of processing.
- **Make structural UI reforms** to make benefits stronger and empower companies to retain workers.

Tax Justice: *Provide economic assistance, through the tax code, to those who most need it*

- **Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC)** in order to reach more people.
- **Extend and expand automatic cash rebates**, regardless of immigration status, age, or tax filing.
- **Close costly tax loopholes** that allow corporations and the very wealthy to avoid paying their fair share.

Incarcerated Population: *Protect the health of those in jails, prisons and detention facilities*

- **Reduce the incarcerated population** and provide immediate access to safety net benefits for those released.
- **Pass H.R.6414**, the COVID-19 Corrections Facility Emergency Response Act.
- **Increase funding for penal institution hospitals, infirmaries** and eliminate costs for inmate health care.

Access to Democracy and COVID-19



Protecting Our Votes

Our Catholic faith teaches that we have a responsibility to participate in politics out of a concern for, and commitment to, the good of the community. **This means that every person has a fundamental right to participate in elections.**

The COVID-19 pandemic comes at a pivotal time in our nation's electoral politics. And COVID-19 has already had real and substantial impacts on several state primary elections. This resulted in unprepared state officials scrambling to balance public health notices and stay at home restrictions with voting rights and election turn-out, to the detriment of the election results.

NETWORK Lobby is gravely concerned about the implications of these primaries on the general election in November. Congress must take steps now to provide states with funding and guidance to address both voting rights and public safety concerns.

There is a clear path forward to conduct fair and successful elections in the midst of a pandemic. However, that path requires Congress to take steps now to enable states to begin planning and preparations.

The \$400 million Congress provided for elections in the CARES Act is a welcome start, but is woefully insufficient to secure our elections and protect our votes in light of COVID-19.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Swiftly provide \$4 billion for the Election Assistance Commission** to uphold a safe and secure general election and support states and localities still facing risks with primary elections. We must have as many safe voting opportunities as possible. The additional funds would support:
 - No-excuse absentee voting with prepaid postage (ballots mailed to all registered voters during an emergency)
 - Extended voter registration period with at least 15 days of early voting
 - Same-day voter registration and online voter registration
 - Election contingency plans to protect the health and safety of poll workers and voters who can't vote absentee
- ✓ **Address funding issues at the USPS** to ensure the necessary public infrastructure is fully operational and capable of handling surges of absentee or vote by mail ballots during primaries and the general election.
- ✓ **Waive the matching requirements for Help America Vote Act (HAVA) grants** to remove barriers to funding elections for states and localities, which are experiencing extreme financial strain in this crisis.

COVID-19 and Democracy

More than 1,098,400 voters returned absentee ballots in the recent Wisconsin primary; absentee voters accounted for nearly 75% of all voters in the election.¹

33 states and D.C. currently offer no-excuse/absentee ballots, including five states that conduct voting by mail (Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington).²

1. WI State Election Commission
<https://elections.wi.gov/blog>

2. Bipartisan Policy Center. "Voting in the Time of Corona"
<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/voting-in-the-time-of-corona-the-difference-between-absentee-voting-and-voting-by-mail/>



Securing Effective Paid Leave

Paid leave has proven to be one of the best safeguards against the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

It is imperative that people who are potentially infected or diagnosed with COVID-19 are able to stay home and self-isolate, in order to flatten the curve and protect others from this deadly virus.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, our current paid leave system was desperately inadequate. The United States had no national standards on paid family or sick leave for workers.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act requires employers with fewer than 500 employees to provide up to two weeks of emergency paid sick leave, and up to an additional ten weeks of paid expanded Family and Medical Leave. The law also set guidelines for corporations to protect their employees through the end of 2020.¹

As people of faith, we believe that our nation's workplace policies must respect the needs of every person in the community. Workers must be able to care for themselves and their families without fear of losing their job or needed income. While the Families First Coronavirus Response Act was a significant first step in establishing emergency paid leave, there are still loopholes that leave many of our nation's workers, specifically low-income workers, vulnerable to COVID-19.

The need for a just paid leave policy has never been greater.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Close the loopholes:** Currently, corporations with over 500 employees have no mandated obligation to provide sick leave for their employees. Also, health care workers and emergency first responders are exempt from the mandated emergency leave, even though they are the most likely to become infected with COVID-19 due to their close contact with those already diagnosed.

While the Families First Coronavirus Response Act included these loopholes because it assumed that large corporations, as well as hospitals, would already provide adequate paid leave policies without the need for a mandate, that assumption has been proven wrong. Multiple large corporations, including Amazon, McDonald's, and Wal-Mart, have left their workers vulnerable by not providing comprehensive paid sick leave or establishing hefty requirements for paid leave eligibility.^{2,3,4} Many corporations' COVID-19 paid sick leave policies are too narrow or dependent on a positive COVID-19 diagnoses, which may be difficult to receive due to limited testing. Hospitals have also left their workers unprotected from the virus by not allowing nurses, doctors, and other hospital staff the opportunity to stay home when they are experiencing symptoms.

Workers' ability to stay home from work if they are sick without fear of retaliation is a basic human right. In the time of COVID-19, our lack of paid leave has greatly increased the number of people suffering and dying from this virus. It is time for Congress to close the loopholes and ensure all have access to paid leave.

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1. U.S. Department of Labor, "Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave Rights" <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcr-employee-paid-leave>
 2. *Buzzfeed News*, "Some Amazon Employees With Fevers Are Being Sent Home Without Pay" <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/carolineodonovan/coronavirus-amazon-employees-sent-home-without-pay>
 3. *Fast Company*, "What it's like to work at McDonald's during the COVID-19 crisis" <https://www.fastcompany.com/90485691/im-at-risk-what-its-like-to-work-at-mcdonalds-during-the-covid-19-crisis>
 4. *CNBC*, "Senators urge Jeff Bezos to give Amazon warehouse workers sick leave, hazard pay" <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/20/senators-to-bezos-give-amazon-warehouse-workers-sick-leave-hazard-pay.html>



Making Health Care a Reality for All

As people of faith, it is imperative that we all work for the common good. We are all equal in the eyes of God; therefore, when one in our community suffers, we all do. One of the examples of great inequality in our nation's social system is access, or lack thereof, to health care. The global health pandemic caused by COVID-19 has greatly exposed the intense flaws in our healthcare systems and the lack of access to the most vulnerable communities in our nation, specifically communities of color. Communities of color have increased rates of infection, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19, and much of this is related to disparities and an inadequate system of health care.

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice is deeply concerned about the deadly consequences COVID-19 will continue to have on our nation without strong changes and increased funding to our nation's healthcare systems. We are at a turning point in the United States in the face of the fear and panic surrounding our nation. We cannot continue to only provide health care to those who can afford it. Health care is a basic human right, and we must start treating all with the dignity they deserve as children of God.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Increase funding for Medicaid:** NETWORK is calling for additional Medicaid funding for states, localities, and tribes, as well as a significant 12% increase to the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). Currently, states are responsible for much of the cost of the response to this emergency, including testing and treatment costs for COVID-19. This strains each state's healthcare system and budget. While the 6.2% increase in FMAP in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act was a start, it is not nearly enough to adequately help states in this crisis. By increasing FMAP, state and local governments will be better supported, more prepared to address immediate health needs, and able to use Medicaid to cover costs related to COVID-19.
- ✓ **Expand Medicaid eligibility:** NETWORK urgently implores Congress to expand Medicaid eligibility to all, regardless of insurance or citizenship status. There are currently millions of people in our nation who are completely uninsured and ineligible for federal health programs. Many people are barred from receiving insurance due to their citizenship status. The first thing we know about this pandemic is that COVID-19 does not discriminate. If people are unable to receive health care without insurance, thousands more will die and the virus will continue to spread. During this crisis, we must expand Medicaid eligibility to all in our nation.
- ✓ **Increase funding for Community Health Centers:** Finally, NETWORK is urging Congress to provide \$8 billion in supplemental emergency funding for Community Health Centers (CHCs). CHCs are vital healthcare providers for vulnerable communities, including those experiencing homelessness, immigrants, and low-income families. CHCs have provided the majority of COVID-19 tests and treatment for these communities since the pandemic began.¹ Unfortunately, CHCs are at risk of closing their doors due to inadequate funding. While NETWORK applauds the \$1.32 billion in emergency funding from the CARES Act, it provides less than \$50 per patient nationwide. This initial funding is not enough to adequately ensure that CHCs can continue to operate.²

1. *U.S. News & World Report*, "Can Community Health Centers Survive the Coronavirus Fight?" <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2020-04-03/can-community-health-centers-survive-the-coronavirus-fight>

2. *Health Affairs*, "Keeping Community Health Centers Strong During the Coronavirus Pandemic is Essential to Public Health" <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200409.175784/full/>



Dignity for Those in Housing Crisis

Housing is a basic human right, and a foundation for a person's ability to meet their own needs.

As the unemployment rate continues to soar, concern is intensifying about how families will pay for living expenses like rent, food, and utilities.¹ Growing numbers of people are staying at home across the nation, without work, and reliant on emergency paychecks designed to stimulate growth and pay for the last month's rent. Millions are in dire need of housing assistance, including those currently experiencing homelessness — a population with elevated risk of exposure to COVID-19 and higher barriers to accessing treatment.²

The CARES Act includes \$4 billion to address the urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness via Emergency Solutions Grants and an estimated \$12 billion in overall housing resources.³ Ultimately, however, more funding is needed to address the needs of people in emergency or transitional shelters as well as those who are vulnerable to losing their homes.

NETWORK supports additional housing assistance for all in response to COVID-19. Having a place to live is critical to human life and dignity.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Increase homelessness assistance funding:** Any comprehensive response to the coronavirus should include emergency assistance funding to help prevent housing instability and homelessness as a result of the outbreak. Congress should increase Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) funding to at least \$11.5 billion to reach more programs assisting the homeless population.
- ✓ **Implement a national, uniform moratorium on evictions and foreclosures:** We need a quick response to mitigate housing instability experienced by those who have lost their jobs during this crisis. The next emergency relief package must include a six-month moratorium on foreclosures and evictions, with no fees, penalties, or accrued interest on mortgage loans and suspend negative credit reporting during the moratorium period.
- ✓ **Provide emergency renters assistance:** Nearly all four million working-age, non-disabled renting households with extremely low incomes are cost-burdened. In a protracted economic recession, an increased number of households will have difficulty paying their rent. To continue helping renters after a national moratorium is lifted, \$100 billion in rental assistance will be needed to shore up back payments.⁴

COVID-19 and Housing

552,830 people experienced homelessness in the United States on a single night in 2018.¹

11.1 million households are severely cost burdened, spending at least half their income on rental housing.²

1. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress" <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2018-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>
2. Urban Institute. "Low-income homeowners are as burdened by housing costs as renters" <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/low-income-homeowners-are-burdened-housing-costs-renters>

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1. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "The Employment Situation — March 2020." <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf>
 2. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, "Disease Risks and Homelessness" <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/diseases/#covid-19-key-resources>
 3. National Low Income Housing Coalition. "Congressional Leaders Agree to Coronavirus Response Package with Funding for Homelessness and Housing." <https://nlihc.org/resource/congressional-leaders-agree-coronavirus-response-package-funding-homelessness-and-housing>
 4. National Low Income Housing Coalition. "The Need for Emergency Rental Assistance during the COVID-19 and Economic Crisis" <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Need-for-Rental-Assistance-During-the-COVID-19-and-Economic-Crisis.pdf>



Solidarity with Immigrants

NETWORK believes true security is achieved when communities come together and cooperate for the common good. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has been quick to distribute aid widely, allocating billions in federal funding for indispensable services and programs. Unfortunately, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act failed to distribute commensurate economic relief and access to essential health services to all, leaving millions of immigrants and their families out.

As people of faith and a nation of immigrants, we are called to love our neighbor. **We must promote the common good for all, regardless of immigration status, in any future COVID-19 relief package.**

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Provide recovery rebates for all:** Under the CARES Act, Congress stipulated that all eligible taxpayers may receive a direct tax rebate of up to \$2,400 for married couples, \$1,200 for unmarried taxpayers, and \$500 for each child under age 17 to offset the economic impacts of the virus and spur recovery. Nonresident immigrants and undocumented immigrants are ineligible for the direct assistance due to exclusions for filers and households using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) — making mixed-status families ineligible too. Denying assistance to immigrants and their families is a grave miscalculation. Millions of people in the U.S. have family members who are unauthorized and have limited access to safety-net programs in the event that they lose their job. All deserve equal opportunity to provide for their families, regardless of immigration status. The success of the nation's economic recovery depends on the disbursement of recovery rebates to all.
- ✓ **Protect immigrant workers:** Immigrants represent a disproportionate share of those working to keep businesses running and the virus contained. They are also disproportionately vulnerable to exposure to the virus in their workplace, due to inadequate standards of risk mitigation. Despite serving as the lifeblood of the nation, immigrant workers face hazardous working conditions, greater risk for falling ill, and limited access to testing, treatment, or assistance for time away from work. Mandating essential workers continue working without assurance of their safety jeopardizes the health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable. Congress must pass additional measures to protect immigrant workers on the frontlines and guarantee more security for their employment, including automatic renewal of work authorizations for immigrant workers.
- ✓ **Reject punitive immigration enforcement:** The Trump administration continues to intimidate immigrant communities by enforcing punitive laws, both in the interior in places like hospitals, and at the border, which remains closed to lawful asylum seekers. In addition to rejecting additional funds for immigration enforcement, Congress should also put a halt to enforcement processes and new regulations that undermine immigrants' access to vital public services.

COVID-19 and Immigrants

4.3 million adults and **3.5 million** children are ineligible for the tax rebate program under the CARES Act all because they use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).¹

6 million immigrant workers are at the frontlines of keeping the U.S. running and healthy.²

1. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, "Addressing the COVID-19 Economic Crisis: Advice for the Next Round" <https://itep.org/addressing-the-covid-19-economic-crisis-advice-for-the-next-round/>
2. Migration Policy Institute, "Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable" <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-workers-us-covid-19-response>



Responding to Food Insecurity

Honoring the dignity of each and every person, NETWORK Lobby advocates for every person and family to have access to healthy, adequate nutrition. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout, it is critical that people can access enough food. We are seeing the surges in demand for food at pantries and other emergency food providers and it is clear that they do not have the capacity to keep up with the need.

Fortunately, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides a highly effective and broad reaching infrastructure for our government to quickly get food to people who need it. **While Congress took positive steps in the CARES Act to open up access and broaden eligibility to supplemental nutrition assistance, more is needed.**

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Increase SNAP benefits:** Strengthen SNAP by increasing the benefit available to all households by 15% and increasing the minimum benefit from \$16 dollars to \$30. These increases would provide a needed boost to benefits for people and families sheltering in place, with limited resources.

The very low levels of benefits (barely \$5 per person daily) have long been recognized as insufficient to ensure proper nutrition. In the current context, they are woefully inadequate to offset the significant loss in income and soaring unemployment resulting from COVID-19-related closures and disruptions.

In light of the uncertainty about the depth and length of the current crisis, we recommend that the increase to SNAP benefits outlined above be kept in place until the economy recovers from its current shock. The economic and health benefits of SNAP are well documented and should not be prematurely rolled back when households remain in a precarious situation.

- ✓ **Delay implementing harmful regulations that jeopardize food access:** Postpone the implementation of new proposed and final rules for SNAP proposed by the Trump administration. The implementation of these rules on program eligibility and restrictions would exacerbate the hardship of low-income families and children at a time when they are most in need.

COVID-19 and Hunger

An additional 17.1 million people could experience food insecurity as a result of school closures, rising unemployment and rising poverty due to quarantine and stay-at-home orders, **an increase of 46%.**

Feeding America, "\$1.4 Billion Shortfall Due To The COVID-19 Crisis"
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/feeding-america-food-bank-network-projects-14-billion-shortfall-due-covid-19>



Streamline Unemployment Assistance

In the midst of the COVID-19 economic crisis, NETWORK Lobby advocates with all service and low-wage workers who are suddenly without a job through no fault of their own. The federal government must step in to provide assistance to these workers to help them avoid utter financial devastation.

A primary infrastructure for providing that needed financial help is our nation's Unemployment Insurance (UI) program. The UI provisions provided in the CARES Act, while expansive, are not enough.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Extend insufficient end dates:** The initial response to the COVID-19 unemployment crisis includes artificial end dates attached to UI programs which must be extended. There is growing clarity that our nation is experiencing a deep economic decline, but tremendous uncertainty about the extent and duration of that decline. The UI benefit increase of \$600 a month is slated to end in late July, but should be pushed minimally until September. The new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program established through the end of the year must be extended as we are learning that future, seasonal waves of contagion are likely. **NETWORK urges Congress to enact a tiered system of expanded UI and PUA benefits based on triggers tied to the health of the economy, NOT a certain end date.**
- ✓ **Fund state Unemployment Insurance processing:** There is a tremendous backlog for UI applications and extreme delays in processing due to the unprecedented surge in need. While huge sectors of our economy are grinding to a halt, people eligible for UI benefits must be able to access them in a timely manner. Congress should include a significant increase in administrative funding for state UI agencies. At this time, we recommend \$10 billion in additional funding.
- ✓ **Make structural reforms:** NETWORK urges deeper, structural UI reforms to strengthen the lifeline for people who have lost jobs due to the pandemic.
 - UI programs should be adjusted to provide a mandatory minimum of 26-weeks-worth of benefits at 60% wage replacement.
 - Structural UI reforms should include mandatory work-sharing arrangements to allow companies to avoid layoffs by putting workers on part-time schedules with partial unemployment benefits. This reform would help workers stay connected to their employers when the economy begins to recover.
 - Extended Benefit (EB) triggers should be adjusted to reflect economic realities by adding weeks of benefits automatically anytime the unemployment rate jumps a half percentage point.

COVID-19 and Unemployment

More than 20 million U.S. workers lost their jobs in 4 weeks as a result of the economic impact of the pandemic.

5.2 million first-time unemployment claims were registered for the week ending April 11.

Vox. "New unemployment filings are so high only the Great Depression compares"
<https://www.vox.com/2020/4/16/21223049/unemployment-filings-high-great-depression>



Targeted Tax Relief

The COVID-19 induced economic crisis requires an urgent response. People need money to pay rent and mortgages, utility bills, grocery bills, and so much more. A combination of targeted tax rebates can lend significant relief to those struggling to deal with both the immediate and long-term impacts of this international financial crisis. At the same time, tax relief must be tailored to meet legitimate COVID-19 needs and not be used to line the pockets of the wealthy. **When making policy, we have a responsibility to consider the good of the community over the interests of the few.**

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Target refundable tax credits to low and moderate-income individuals:** NETWORK Lobby strongly supports inclusion of the Economic Mobility Act (H.R.3300) in the next COVID-19 legislation. This bill makes the Child Tax Credit (CTC) fully available to 26 million low-income children who receive only a partial credit or no credit because their families' incomes are too low, and a significant Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) increase for childless workers, more than 5 million of whom are currently taxed into, or deeper into, poverty. These provisions provide needed economic stimulus to bolster the income of millions of low- and middle-income families for what will be a very difficult labor market through at least 2021. Finally, because Black and Latinx workers continue facing disproportionately lower wages and higher rates of unemployment, expanding the EITC and Child Tax Credit helps mend the racial wealth and income gap.
- ✓ **Extend and expand automatic cash rebates:** The CARES Act provided a one-time "recovery rebate" payment. The average rebate will be \$1,436 for the bottom 20th percentile. Still, dependents over 16, adults claimed as dependents, households using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs), and those whose income is too low to file were ineligible. This resulted in 7.5 million low-income households being left out, disproportionately our nation's lowest-income households. Future legislation must include universal recurring cash payments to help individuals and households weather job losses and economic disruptions. These payments must be easily accessible and available to all, including families and individuals who have low- or no-income and do not file tax returns, households using ITINs including mixed-immigration-status families, and others for whom the first payment was not available.
- ✓ **Close costly tax loopholes:** Congress should repeal two costly tax handouts to wealthy business owners and corporations included in the CARES Act in future COVID-19 relief bills.
 - The first break allows corporations and pass-through businesses to carry back losses not only from this pandemic-ravaged year, but for the previous two years as well when the economy was healthy.
 - The second, and much more costly, tax break gives the wealthiest pass-through business owners the right to apply an unlimited amount of business losses from 2018, 2019 and 2020 against their *non-business income*, like stocks, bonds and other valuable financial assets. This tax break could cost \$86 billion in 2020 alone with 82% of the benefits going to those making \$1 million or more.³

1. Tax Foundation. "Congress Approves Economic Relief Plan for Individuals and Businesses" <https://taxfoundation.org/cares-act-senate-coronavirus-bill-economic-relief-plan/>

2. ITEP, "New State-by-State Estimates: Modified Senate GOP Stimulus Bill Still Falls Short" <https://itep.org/new-state-by-state-estimates-modified-senate-gop-stimulus-bill-still-falls-short/>

3. Joint Committee on Taxation. Letter to Senator Whitehouse and Rep. Doggett. <https://www.whitehouse.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/116-0849.pdf>



Protecting the Health of Incarcerated People

The Department of Justice must protect the health of those in jails, prisons and detention facilities.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, incarcerated people are among the most vulnerable. The virus shows that each person's wellness depends on the health of everyone else. This is especially true for those in prisons, jails and detention centers. The enclosed nature of these facilities, the difficulty of maintaining proper hygiene and the rate at which jail and prison staff come and go, all ensure that COVID-19, once introduced, will quickly spread, endangering everyone involved. We already have incidences of this in facilities around the country. Swift action must be taken now to protect those who are incarcerated, their families and visitors, staff who work in these facilities, and the general public.

We have a moral obligation to ensure that people in jails and prisons are not needlessly exposed to COVID-19. The Bureau of Prisons (BOP) can slow the spread of the virus by applying the provisions of the CARES Act expansively, without imposition of arbitrary limitations or unnecessary barriers. Decisions about who should be released early or placed on home confinement should be driven by medical need and safety, not punishment. No determination of release should be connected to original offense, algorithm, administrative infraction or security classification. The goal should be saving as many lives as possible while ensuring public safety.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Reduce the incarcerated population** using all available mechanisms to release as many people as possible at a higher risk of infection, as well as those who pose no significant risk to society.
- ✓ **Pass H.R.6414, the COVID-19 Corrections Facility Emergency Response Act** to establish a Pandemic Emergency Response grant program to cover the costs of testing, treatment, and community support services for individuals released due to COVID-19.
- ✓ **Provide immediate access to safety net benefits for those released** by lifting bans on housing assistance and other social safety net programs (such as SNAP, Medicaid and TANF) so those who are released have access to housing and other resources to protect themselves and the public.
- ✓ **Increase funding for penal institution hospitals and infirmaries:** Provide additional funding for prison hospitals and infirmaries as well as funding for incarceration facilities to implement quarantining and social distancing procedures beyond solitary confinement.
- ✓ **Eliminate costs for inmate health care:** Eliminate co-pays and other fees for health care, especially COVID-19 testing and treatment, for those who remain incarcerated.

COVID-19 and Incarceration

Less than 10% of jails are certified for infectious disease control.¹

12 states ban formerly incarcerated individuals from receiving TANF. **7 states** prohibit SNAP benefits, and **19 states** terminate access to Medicaid once a person is incarcerated.²

1. American Journal of Public Health "Pandemic Influenza and Jail Facilities and Populations."
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4504367/>

2. The Hamilton Project. "Twelve Facts about Incarceration and Prisoner Reentry"
https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/thp_20161020_twelve_facts_incarceration_prisoner_reentry.pdf

Our country's addiction to mass incarceration could jeopardize the health of millions of people, especially people of color who are over-represented in our criminal justice system. Before this crisis, our jails and prisons were already unhealthy and unsustainable. Now, we must protect those who cannot protect themselves as a result of their confinement and we must re-examine our criminal justice system as a whole, once this crisis has ended.