

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: **Will we allow this pandemic to increase disparities or will we prioritize an equitable recovery for our communities and our nation?**

Our country's next coronavirus response package must address racial inequities in this pandemic, prioritize families' economic security, and provide housing, nutrition, and health care for all. The grave challenges facing the United States and the world are unprecedented and require a bold and compassionate response.

The Reality of the COVID-19 Pandemic

For nearly 50 years, NETWORK's advocacy has been rooted in the lived realities of individuals and families on the social and economic margins. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic lays bare the ways our federal government has failed to structure a society that cares for all in our country. The truth is that much of our lack of preparedness, the deluge of unmet need, and the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 through most of the country is due to chronic, willful dismantling of our social safety net.

In light of the struggles facing families, Congress must pass a bold, forward-looking COVID-19 relief package to support families, protect our communities, and revitalize our nation.

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 and bear a profound loss in the death of elders and tribal leaders.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 As vaccines are administered, we must ensure vaccine distribution is equitable and prioritizes those most at risk of infection and death from COVID-19, regardless of immigration status.

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.

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

Livable Income: *Raise the minimum wage for workers and extend unemployment benefits*

- **Raise the minimum wage** to support minimum wage workers and their families.
- **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.

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

- **Reinstate emergency paid leave requirements and close loopholes** allowing large corporations and certain healthcare 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 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 funding for community-based vaccine outreach workers** to ensure equitable vaccine distribution in Black, Brown, and Indigenous populations as well as hard to reach communities.

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

- **Expand, strengthen, and enforce the Biden administration's federal eviction moratorium.** Implement a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions to alleviate immediate housing concerns.
- **Provide \$30 billion in emergency rental and utility assistance** to help renters along with the moratorium.
- **Provide \$5 billion in emergency assistance** for housing those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- **Fund \$28 billion to Housing Vouchers** to assure housing stability for some of the lowest-income renters.

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

- **Protect immigrant workers** by strengthening labor protections and automatically extending work authorization for those impacted by filing delays.
- **Ensure that immigrants families and individuals have access to the COVID-19 vaccines** as well as necessary health care services to defeat COVID-19.

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

- **Increase SNAP benefits by 15%** providing a much-needed boost for households with limited means.
- **Eliminate SNAP eligibility barriers** and eliminate the public charge rule.
- **Expand eligibility for school lunch programs** and provide waivers in order to provide meals when school is not in session.

Tax Justice: *Provide needed economic assistance through the tax code*

- **Approve automatic cash rebates**, regardless of immigration status, age, or tax filing.
- **Permanently expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and a robust Child Tax Credit (CTC)** to reduce children poverty by 50%.
- **Close costly tax loopholes** that allow corporations and the very wealthy to avoid paying their fair share.

Incarcerated Populations: *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.
- **Reintroduce and pass the COVID-19 Corrections Facility Emergency Response Act.**
- **Increase funding for penal institution hospitals, infirmaries and eliminate costs for inmate health care.**



Streamline Unemployment Assistance

As COVID-19 crisis enters its second year, many individuals and families have used the last of their last savings. NETWORK Lobby advocates with all workers who are suddenly without a job through no fault of their own. The federal government must continue providing assistance to these workers to prevent them and their families experiencing utter financial devastation.

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

Additionally, to support workers during this health crisis, it is past time to begin increasing in the federal minimum wage to \$15 by 2025. Working families need a wage of at least \$15 an hour in order to make ends meet. As the government helps keep businesses afloat, now the time to support workers as well.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Raise the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour** to support minimum-wage workers during this economic crisis and establish a more just minimum wage.
- ✓ **Extend pandemic unemployment benefit end dates:** With continued widespread job loss, unemployed pandemic unemployment assistance must be extended at the higher rate of \$400 per week until September 2021 to help families get through this time of economic crisis.
- ✓ **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 22 million U.S. workers lost their jobs in March and April 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The nation is still down 10 million jobs since the pandemic began.

CNN. "US Economy Adds 49,000 jobs in January – A Grim Sign for the Jobs Recovery"

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/05/economy/january-2021-jobs-report/index.html>



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.

As people of faith, we believe our nation's workplace policies must respect the needs of every person. Workers must be able to care for themselves and their families without fear of losing their job or needed income. While the previous COVID-19 relief packages have taken significant steps 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.

- Put the requirement back in place for paid leave and eliminate exemptions for employers with more than 500 and less than 50 employees.
- Expand paid sick and family and medical leave to 14 weeks
- Expand emergency paid leave to include federal workers.
- Provide a maximum paid leave benefit of \$1,400 per-week for eligible workers.
- Fully fund states' short-time compensation programs and additional weeks of benefits.

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Close the loopholes** by reinstating the requirement for paid leave and eliminate exemptions for employers with more than 500 or less than 50 employees. Emergency paid leave must include federal employees as well as all essential workers on the front lines who are more likely to contract COVID-19 due to their jobs. 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.
- ✓ **Expand paid sick and family leave** by 14 weeks and workers should be provided adequate pay during their leave. Nearly a year into this pandemic, Congress must provide funding to states' short term compensation programs and supplement their benefits.
- ✓ **Protect workers' ability to stay home from work if they are sick without fear of retaliation.** 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.

1. U.S. Department of Labor, "Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Employee Paid Leave Rights"

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-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.cnbc.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.

Native American tribes as well as the Black and Latinx communities in the United States have experienced higher rates of infection and death as a result of COVID-19 since the very beginning of this pandemic. They must be prioritized as states continue providing vaccinations. We cannot allow the vaccine distribution to contribute to the disparate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color.

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.
- ✓ **Provide funding for community-based vaccine outreach:** NETWORK urges for equitable vaccine distribution in Black, Brown, and Indigenous populations as well as hard to reach communities. Congress must set up federally-supported community vaccination centers across the country to get as many people vaccinated as quickly as possible.

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

Currently 1 in 5 renters are not caught up with their rent with renters of color disproportionately experiencing this hardship. Additionally, households with children are twice as likely to be behind with their rent.

While previous relief packaged have provided funding to housing, 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:

- ✓ **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 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, \$30 billion in rental and utility assistance will be needed.
- ✓ **Increase homelessness assistance funding:** Our comprehensive response to the coronavirus must include emergency assistance funding to help prevent housing instability and homelessness as a result of the outbreak. Congress should increase Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) with at least \$5 billion to prevent and respond to COVID-19. Additionally, \$44 billion in Housing Trust Fund resources should be allocated to states and localities so they can properly adapt temporary and permanent housing solutions to be COVID-19 safe environments.

COVID-19 and Housing

568,000 people experienced homelessness in the United States on a single night in 2019.¹

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. "2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress" <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2019-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>

Bureau of Labor Statistics. "The Employment Situation — March 2020." <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

1. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities - <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and>

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.

As people of faith and a nation of immigrants, we are called to love our neighbor. **We must promote the health and wellbeing of all, regardless of immigration status, in COVID-19 relief packages.**

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Provide recovery rebates for all:** In December, stimulus payments were available to the legal immigrants and U.S. citizen members of mixed-status families, for the first time. This included both the \$600 stimulus check passed in December as well as retroactively, the March CARES Act check. Still, no federal funds went to tax filers with an ITIN making the millions of undocumented people in the United States barred from receiving the same economic support. 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:** Despite President Biden's Executive Order and new guidelines on interior enforcement the agencies continue to intimidate immigrant communities by enforcing punitive laws, both in the interior, 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

An estimated **4.3 million adults and 3.5 million children** would benefit from providing economic support payments to tax filers who use an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number).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 its COVID relief packages to open up access and broaden eligibility to supplemental nutrition assistance, more is needed.**

What Congress Can Do:

- ✓ **Continue increased SNAP benefits:** Extend the 15% increased the SNAP benefit available to all households until the economy recovers. This increase provides a needed boost of benefits to 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 COVID-19 crisis, we recommend that the increase to SNAP benefits 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.

- ✓ **Eliminate harmful regulations that jeopardize food access to those in need:** including eliminating harmful regulations that jeopardize food access to those in need, including non-citizens and those with a criminal record. These barriers to eligibility exacerbate the hardship of low-income families and children at a time when they are most in need.
- ✓ **Expand eligibility for school lunch programs** and provide emergency funding for meals during periods of school closures.

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>



Automatic Stimulus Funds and 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 automatic and targeted tax rebates can lend significant relief to those struggling with both the short and long-term impacts of this international financial crisis. 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:

- ✓ **Provide automatic cash rebates:** Automatic, immediate cash rebates of \$1400 should be provided to everyone in the United States regardless of immigration status, age, or tax filing. 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.
- ✓ **Target refundable tax credits to low and moderate-income individuals:** NETWORK Lobby strongly supports inclusion of the American Families Act in the next COVID-19 legislation. This bill increases the maximum Child Tax Credit from \$2,000 per child to \$3,000 with an additional \$600 for each child under the age of six. The American Rescue Plan also includes 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.

- ✓ **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, have resulted in the virus claiming thousands of lives behind bars and infected 1 out of every 5 people in prison.¹

We have a moral obligation to ensure that people in jails and prisons are not needlessly exposed to COVID-19 and those that are exposed have access to health care. The Bureau of Prisons (BOP) can slow the spread of the virus by providing access to comprehensive and frequent testing, improving health care access, and expanding compassionate release. 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.

COVID-19 and Incarceration

More than **1,700 incarcerated people** have died from COVID-19 in the past year.¹

1. 1 in 5 Prisoners in the U.S Has Had COVID-19, 1,700 Have Died - <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/1-in-5-prisoners-in-the-us-has-had-covid-19-1700-have-died>

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.
- ✓ **Reintroduce and pass 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.

Our country's addiction to mass incarceration has jeopardized 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.

1. COVID-19 and the Criminal Justice System - <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/virus/>