



March 20, 2020

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

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Congressional Action and Protecting Latino Communities

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

I write on behalf of UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza) to urge you to act swiftly to approve legislation that protects the health and economic well-being of millions of Americans, including the 58 million Latinos across the nation. We thank you for the recent actions that provided emergency resources to federal, state, and local health systems, COVID-19 testing and for families who overnight are facing unprecedented challenges in access to health care and struggling to put food on the table for children now out of school.

As the novel Coronavirus spreads into the far reaches of our communities in all 50 states and more of our neighbors fall ill and the death toll rises, the pain and hardship caused by the pandemic will grow exponentially. The burden of these hardships will also fall disproportionately on poor—as well as low-to-moderate-income families—particularly those vulnerable families, children, and workers locked out of the federal and state social safety net, including immigrants raising U.S.-born children.

Latinos have made significant contributions to the nation’s economy and prosperity. However, the legacy of inequality and discrimination has resulted in disparities in health and economic outcomes for the Latino community. These disparities will grow if Congress responds to the current crises with measures that fail to reach all families in need.

Many Hispanics Americans are on the frontlines of this crises responding to the pandemic. They are the doctors and health workers, law enforcement personnel, and essential government workers protecting our food and water systems. Moreover, Latinos are helping to provide human needs services to families through local community-based organizations. UnidosUS has a network of nearly 300 community-based Affiliates across the United States and Puerto Rico,

working currently to protect their employees while continuing to provide needed services at the local level. They too are desperately in need of support to continue to provide vital services.

As you continue to work on a bipartisan relief package, I urge to:

Address the major health care needs of the Latino community. The only way to contain the spread and conquer of COVID-19 is to ensure everyone, regardless of income or place of birth, has access to free and readily available testing, health care, and nutrition. As in previous public health emergencies like the September 11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina, extending Medicaid coverage is the most effective means of providing needed health care to the uninsured and underinsured. Federal barriers to Medicaid ought to be immediately removed. States should be empowered to create a Medicaid-based backstop to other sources of insurance and remove discriminatory barriers and red tape to ensure swift enrollment and full access to COVID-19 screening or treatment. This will also require that an emergency Special Enrollment Period (SEP) is opened to everyone and that Congress lift the five-year waiting period currently in place for lawful permanent residents to access Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP.

UnidosUS Affiliates have raised the alarm that limited English proficient populations (LEP) are experiencing needless barriers to accurate information on COVID-19 and the health care and safety net they need to protect themselves and their families. I therefore urge you to dedicate funding to support and ensure the availability of language access services in health care settings, including community-based organizations, that are responding to COVID-19.

Provide economic aid to all in need and those able to put money directly back into local/state economies. To protect Latino and other families, the paid sick and family leave protections included in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act need to be expanded to cover all workers, including gig and nonprofit employees, and for the length of both the pandemic and the oncoming recession. Congress must also provide direct and robust cash payments for all low- and moderate-income individuals including those with ITINs, with greater support for individuals who have children. Now is not the time to have a debate on immigration policy but to make sure economic activity can flow once more throughout the nation's cities and states, particularly in places where immigrants are a vital component of the local economy.

Allow Latinos to remain safely in their homes for the duration of the crisis. Emergency relief must allow both homeowners and renters to stay in their homes. Programs that help prevent foreclosures, provide rental assistance to individuals or relief to landlords to prevent evictions and help people pay their utilities should be expanded and robustly funded. This should also include \$100 million for the Housing Counseling Assistance Program to ensure HUD-approved counseling agencies have sufficient resources to deal with an expected increase in foreclosure prevention, tenant counseling, and to address foreclosure rescue scams that target underserved communities.

Act swiftly and decisively to protect the unemployed, consumers, and small businesses.

UnidosUS strongly supports: (1) expansion of emergency unemployment, which will be needed

by thousands of families and breadwinners who will lose their jobs through no fault of their own; (2) all consumer lenders should be required to provide payment relief for up to six months, with no interest, fees, or adverse credit reporting; and (3) Congress should also establish a temporary small business loan program designed to address shortfalls in revenue by offering interest-free loans to small businesses, which would be administered through a network of trusted nonprofit organizations and Community Development Financial Institutions.

Prevent Latino children and students from falling even further behind their peers while schools grapple with the crises. Schools across the country have closed and will likely be closed for months. This will widen the education and opportunity gap, place children at risk without adequate and safe child care resources, and leave students in the school lunch program hungry. It is paramount that broadband internet access is expanded, and that the curriculum and tools children, including English learners, need to participate in school online are developed and funded. Early learning programs like Head Start should be strengthened to meet quality child care needs of families once the current situation improves.

Economic hardship will hit individuals with student loans particularly hard. Future relief should therefore cancel student loan payments, institute automatic loan forbearance, cease all involuntary payments on student loans, and ensure that borrowers in eligible repayment plans are still on track to forgiveness.

Ensure that all people are protected and safe. During these trying times, immigrants will be one of the most vulnerable communities in the country. Sadly, they have already suffered tremendously as a result of the administration's cruel anti-immigrant campaign. It is imperative that Congress live up to its moral obligations and ensure that all people—including immigrants—are protected. UnidosUS urges Congress to ensure that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) follow the announcement the agency made to focus enforcement and detention on public safety risks, and that no immigration enforcement actions take place at or near health care facilities.

Protect all families facing a pandemic and economic crisis unseen in generations. Latinos, immigrants, and low-wage workers are on the front lines of this crisis, often at great risk to themselves and their families. We also need to ensure that relief reaches the people of Puerto Rico, who will endure compounded challenges as they struggle to overcome the physical and economic disaster afflicted by Hurricane Maria and the recent earthquake. Like all Americans, Latinos will make sacrifices in the name of public health and face deep personal and financial hardships.

We call on you, our national leaders, to put partisanship and differences aside, eliminate all barriers to testing and health care for the duration of the crisis and aggressively fortify the safety net to protect all families. Lives and livelihoods are at stake. To avert a national calamity, you must fight for the most vulnerable among us in the same way that you surely fight for your own families and loved ones. Our shared future and the future of the United States depends on it.

The UnidosUS family, including our nearly 300 Affiliate organizations across the country, are working hard and committed to helping our nation get through this difficult time and bounce back stronger than ever. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or Susan Collins, Senior Director of Legislative Affairs, at (202) 776-1743 or scollins@unidosus.org, if we can be of assistance in any way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguía". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Murguía
President and CEO
UnidosUS