



STRONGER COMMUNITIES. STRONGER AMERICA.

April 21, 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: The Time Is Now to Include Everyone in Pandemic and Economic Relief

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

Thank you for your work to ensure the passage of the three coronavirus relief packages, vital first steps that will help millions of Americans in need. As we have communicated repeatedly, however, those first steps have left far too many in our country behind and unfortunately, the interim emergency relief legislation package scheduled for a vote in the Senate today fails to significantly mend that course, which is disproportionately impacting America's Latino* community. Given that there is no clear path beyond today's limited action to ensure that more critical health care and economic support swiftly reaches families in need, UnidosUS opposes this legislation in its current form.

We cannot fully restore our economy until the pandemic is controlled, but no contagious virus can be controlled if the nation's public health response continues to exclude significant portions of the population and if not everyone on the frontlines has the protections needed to do their jobs and avoid getting sick. Similarly, economic recovery will be undermined if the most vulnerable workers are left behind. It is simply not possible to simultaneously control the pandemic and ensure a robust economic recovery if public policy responses ignore the needs and interests of those workers and families, among whom Latinos are overrepresented.

At nearly 60 million strong, America's Latino community has long made significant contributions to our country's economic, social, and civic life. Under the current pandemic, their ongoing contributions have placed them and their families directly in harm's way. From health care and agricultural jobs to grocery, retail, and gig work, Latinos and immigrants are overrepresented in frontline positions that are universally recognized as essential and place them and their families at increased risk of getting sick from COVID-19.

*The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

The available data from around the country are beginning to show the grim reality that Latinos are overrepresented among the sick and dying; in states as diverse as New York¹ and Oregon² they are suffering disproportionately to their share of the population. According to recently released data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Latinos account for 18% of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the United States, as well as one-third of all cases among those under the age of 18.³ Unfortunately, Latinos' higher risk of exposure to and contracting the virus is tragically compounded by the long-standing inequities in our health system where more than 10 million Latinos in our country are uninsured—including 1.6 million Latino children.⁴

The lack of health insurance and the denial of COVID-19 treatment in past relief legislation for millions of Latinos will undermine our ability to contain the spread of the virus. To ignore this threatens the health and lives of all Americans. Aid to hospitals to care for indigent patients is not a solution for those disconnected from the mainstream health care system and by law restricted and barred from accessing public health care even during a pandemic. This includes farmworkers, undocumented workers, families with mixed immigration status, and even legal permanent residents lawfully in the country and subject to continued legal restrictions to health care services.

Legislative efforts have also excluded large portions of the population from economic relief, which will sadly undermine our nation's recovery. Across the board, Latinos—including citizens, legal residents, mixed-status families, and the undocumented—have been purposefully excluded from programs or left out due to systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing even the programs they purportedly qualify for. Like all Americans, Latinos need and deserve equitable access to resources that help them meet their basic needs during this emergency.

The circumstances outlined above are dire and demand substantive and immediate action. While there are provisions in this interim package that are needed and important, the scope of this relief measure is far too limited and narrow to meet the urgent needs that have been left unaddressed.

At minimum, the following provisions, all of which have been enumerated in more detail in prior [letters](#), must be included in relief legislation to garner UnidosUS's support:

Latinos need access to health care, and COVID-19 testing and treatment. All individuals should have ready access to coronavirus testing and treatment, including the uninsured and underinsured, regardless of immigration status, and including those with DACA and TPS. Congress should provide that treatment of COVID-19 is a mandatory benefit for all Medicaid beneficiaries and that COVID-19 and associated health problems must also be considered an “emergency medical condition” for the purposes of emergency Medicaid. The five-year waiting

¹ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, “Death Rate by Race/Ethnicity Group,” <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-deaths-race-ethnicity-04162020-1.pdf>.

² Oregon Health Authority, “Oregon COVID Daily Update 4/14/2020,” https://govsite-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/dHrMqOPwShqdGtQ91cjl_Oregon-COVID-19-Update-04-14-2020-FINAL.pdf.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Cases of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) in the U.S.,” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>.

⁴ UnidosUS and Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, “Decade of Success for Latino Children's Health Now in Jeopardy,” <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2039>.

period preventing legal permanent residents from accessing Medicaid/CHIP should be eliminated and a larger federal investment in Medicaid is urgently needed.

Latinos need cash to meet their basic needs. All families, including mixed-status families, need access to cash payments. This means individuals with ITIN numbers and their family members, including U.S. citizens and children, should receive these payments. In addition, all workers, especially those risking their health and lives in essential jobs, deserve access to unemployment benefits.

Latinos need emergency access to nutrition programs and food. Congress must increase SNAP benefits and expand eligibility to include all immigrants, regardless of status. An increase in the SNAP maximum benefit and the minimum monthly SNAP benefit are needed. Investments in Disaster SNAP (D-SNAP) also need to expand.

While improvements are needed, UnidosUS does not object to individual provisions in the interim package; the problem is that it does too little to address the emergent and growing needs of our communities and there is no clear plan forward to address them. We are beginning to bear witness to the exclusion of millions from relief so far. Latinos are disproportionately getting sick and dying, and as people lose their jobs too many are excluded from relief so far and are unable to make ends meet, pay their mortgage or rent, or buy food.

We urge you to continue your negotiations beyond today's package, to take an honest look at the sacrifice and suffering happening in every corner of America, and take the necessary action to equitably provide healing, interim support, and the promise of recovery to all families. Because this package does not fully respond to the needs of Latinos and the country, UnidosUS opposes it.

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