

Enact Policies to Protect Workers as U.S. Faces Coronavirus

Current state and federal policies often leave underpaid workers without the resources and protections they need. As we collectively fight the coronavirus, the exclusionary policy choices legislators have made are even more apparent. Black, indigenous, and people of color including immigrants in tenuous job situations are at increased risk and among them: “gig,” temp, workers wrongly classified as independent contractors, workers in low-wage jobs, service workers, airport workers, maintenance workers, homecare workers, and health care providers are all at even more risk. Racial health disparities will exacerbate the situation.

Now is the time for us to come together and address these inequities, the following policies would save lives and ensure that all people have dignity and the economic security to guarantee their health and safety. These policies must be enacted to respond to this crisis and preserved to reflect our values.

Federal Policies

We will continue to update this as soon as possible. To stay in the loop with updates and resources, visit our website, follow us on Instagram, friend us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter (@NELPnews).

Unemployment Insurance

- The next emergency package must dramatically increase UI benefits over the course of this crisis and restore the unwise cuts states have made, returning it to the perfect go-to counter-recessionary standard it has been since 1935. First, we have to make sure all states increase maximum benefit duration to 26 weeks. If extended benefits kick in, or Congress passes extended benefits before states restore duration to 26 weeks, their extension will only be 50% of their current duration, so a state like Alabama that cut duration to 14 weeks would only get 7 additional weeks where other states would be getting 13. Furthermore, benefit levels can be set at a federal minimum, too. Given this moment, it is not too rash to require 100% income replacement for a short period under UI. We need to do whatever we can to ensure that states are rapidly and immediately getting benefits to workers.

PAID Leave Act

- Senator Murray, Representative DeLauro, and Senator Gillibrand [introduced](#) the PAID Leave Act (Providing Americans Insured Days of Leave Act), an updated emergency paid leave bill that makes available to ALL workers 14 days of paid sick leave and 12 weeks of

paid family and medical leave. The bill will fully reimburse employers for all paid sick days and paid leave in 2020 and 2021. [NELP's statement](#) on this model legislation.

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Act

- Senators Wyden, Peters, and Schumer [introduced](#) legislation that will create a temporary unemployment compensation program to provide benefits to individuals unable to work because of coronavirus. The program will cover self-employed workers and workers without sufficient work history to qualify for regular unemployment insurance.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act

- This bill, which passed in the House and then in the Senate, was signed into law on March 18, 2020. While it did not include the important provisions included in the original [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (H.R. 6201), it did have some important unemployment insurance administrative funding. [NELP's statement](#).
- This bill authorizes \$1 billion in UI administrative funding. The first \$500 million would be based on the current distribution formula and would automatically flow to states that have increased claims attributable to the outbreak. As states receive this funding, however, states with low reciprocity must make plans to improve the number of workers who can access benefits.
- The second \$500 million would flow to states that take certain COVID-19 related emergency steps, including:
 - Waiving the work search requirement – it is a matter of common sense and public health for workers whose search involves in person contact to suspend this requirement during a pandemic.
 - Waiving the waiting period – it is critical that we get benefits to workers as fast as possible during this crisis so as to forestall or weaken an ensuing bigger recession
 - Ensuring that employers understand that their experience rating – or UI tax rate – will not be affected by outbreak-related claims.
- In the event that a recession follows this outbreak, this legislation waives a penalty in the federal Extended Benefits language for waiving waiting weeks.

Occupational and Safety and Health Administration Emergency Temporary Standard

- A vitally important provision to protect front line health care and other at-risk workers from COVID-19 by requiring the Occupational and Safety and Health Administration to issue right away an Emergency Standard. Currently, there are little or no enforceable protections to protect workers on the front line.
- We are outraged that the House bill excluded the health care worker protection requirements, and we must support the same bill in Senate: [COVID-19 Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2020 \(S.3475\)](#)
- The Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) must enact an Emergency Temporary Standard to ensure steps are taken to protect all workers who perform essential functions and are at an elevated risk of occupational exposure to the coronavirus. The ETS must ensure employers are providing the necessary protective equipment and training to protect all workers, including healthcare workers, emergency responders, and other health care employees in traditional health care settings, as well as home health care workers, school nurses, prison nurses, and more.

State and Local Policies

- States should ensure their [Unemployment Insurance](#) (UI) policies are meeting the needs of all workers.
- Pass Paid Sick Leave legislation that is available to all workers and remind residents of existing policies, if there are any.
- Pass Paid Family and Medical Leave policies that are available to all workers and remind residents of existing policies, if there are any.
- Support policies that ensure all people have access to quality health care, including testing for COVID-19 ⑤

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