

## CONSUMER PROTECTIONS and WORKPLACE RIGHTS

<https://panetta.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-panetta-calls-education-secretary-devos-protect-students-financial>

<https://panetta.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-panetta-calls-moratorium-foreclosures-and-evictions-federally>

The financial vulnerabilities of many Americans are becoming painfully clear as the coronavirus pandemic progresses. Among those affected are students at colleges and universities and those living in federal housing or purchasing homes through federal loan programs. Some members of Congress have been calling on federal departments and agencies to fast-track programs to protect these groups. A bipartisan group of 72 Congressmembers have requested that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos take all possible steps to identify the costs students are incurring as a result of college and university closures and to “identify how students may be reimbursed for any educational expenditures related to the coronavirus.” These expenditures include debt accruing on student loans; the costs of travel home when dormitories are closed; reimbursement of monies paid for on-campus housing, if that is closed; and the costs related to cancelled study abroad programs. A group of 106 Congressmembers is calling for an immediate moratorium on foreclosures and evictions from properties owned, insured, or overseen by the following federal agencies and programs: Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Federal Housing Administration, the Veterans’ Administration, and the Department of Agriculture. Sixty-three percent of all mortgages originating in the U.S. are affiliated with one of these agencies or programs. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**JOIN** in asking DeVos to begin immediate work to protect students from coronavirus-related expenses

- **Betsy DeVos**, Secretary of Education, 400 Maryland Ave SW, Washington DC 20202, (202) 401-3000

**JOIN** in asking administration leadership to immediately end foreclosures and evictions

- **Mark Calabria**, Director, Federal Housing Authority, 400 7<sup>th</sup> St. SW, Washington DC 20024, (202) 708-1112

- **Ben Carson**, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, 451 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. SW, Washington DC 20410, (202) 708-1112

- **Robert Wilkie**, Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs, 810 Vermont Ave. NW, Washington DC 20420, (800) 488-8244

• **Sonny Perdue**, Secretary of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington DC 20410, (202) 720-2791

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/03/17/offering-model-nation-battling-outbreak-new-york-ag-suspends-all-medical-and-student>

New York's State Attorney General Leticia James has announced the suspension of all collection of medical and student loan debt owed to the state and a halt to the accrual of interest for these debts. She has also invited Residents of the state to apply for temporary collection halts for any other debts owed to the state. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**ASK** our Governor and State Attorney General to explore any such steps California can take to minimize the financial impact of coronavirus on vulnerable Californians

• **Governor Gavin Newsom**, 1303 10th Street, Suite 1173, Sacramento, CA 95814, (916) 445-2841

• **Attorney General Xavier Becerra**, 1300 "I" Street, Sacramento, CA 95814, (916) 952-5225

<https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/3/16/21182046/courts-disability-immigration-coronavirus>  
<https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2020/03/19/covid-19-coronavirus-exposure-boston-immigration-court>

Many courts around the U.S. have shut down amid coronavirus pandemic, but some have done so only recently and others continue to operate. The Social Security Administration continued to hold disability hearings through March 20, a particularly troubling choice given the physical vulnerability of many disability recipients. Immigration hearings for those *not* in detention have been suspended, but hearings are still being held for those in detention, despite a March 15 letter calling for immediate suspension of all hearings issued by the National Association of Immigration Judges; the American Federation of Government Employees, Local 511, which represents Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Employees; and the American Immigration Lawyers Association. Of course, cancelling hearing while continuing to hold asylum-seekers in detention or forcing them to remain in Mexico as a result of the Migrant "Protection" Protocols (snarky quotation marks added) leave these individuals vulnerable. Multiple organizations, from local to national, have been calling for the release of immigration detainees to prevent the spread of coronavirus in detention facilities, which are notoriously crowded and under-provisioned. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**TELL** the Social Security Administration that, while you appreciate their decision to end in-person disability hearings, this move was made far too late and put too many vulnerable people at risk of contracting the coronavirus

- **Andrew M. Saul**, Director, Social Security Administration, 6401 Security Blvd., Baltimore, MD 21235, (800) 772-1213

- **Gail S. Ennis**, Inspector General, Social Security Administration, 6401 Security Blvd., Suite 300, Baltimore, MD 21235, (410) 965-2905

**JOIN** calls for an end to in-person hearing for detainees in immigration custody and for the release of these individuals until the pandemic is over

- **Chad Wolf**, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security, Washington DC 20528, (202) 282-8495  
*[no street address as per the DHS web site]*

- **Matthew T. Albence**, Acting Director, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 500 12<sup>th</sup> St. SW, Washington DC 20536

## ELECTIONS

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/26>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/92>

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/138>

At the moment, we have both a national emergency and a rapidly approaching election. One of the concerns raised as a result is how to guarantee the right of Americans to vote in the November Presidential election, should limits on public assembly and shelter-in-place orders remain in effect at that time. A solution to this problem is already sitting with Congress. The Vote by Mail Act (S.26 in the Senate; H.R.92 in the House) would guarantee the right of every American to receive a vote-by-mail ballot. The House also has a second, similar piece of legislation, H.R.138, the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act. S.26 is with the Senate Rules and Administration Committee. H.R.92 is with two House committees: Administration and Oversight and Reform. H.R.138 is with the House Administration Committee. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**URGE** support for S.26 to protect our elections at this challenging time

- **Senator Roy Blunt** (R-MO), Chair, Senate Rules and Administration Committee, 305 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, (202) 224-6352

- **Senator Amy Klobuchar** (D-MN), Ranking Member, Senate Rules and Administration Committee, 305 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, (202) 224-6352

- **Find your Senators here:**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fWPKEeiBUwv0vaiTGYGKO37TWU4aSULWvI5sgOo5YS4/edit>

**URGE** support for H.R.92 and H.R.138

- **Representative Zoe Lofgren** (D-CA), Chair, House Oversight Committee, 1309 Longworth House Office Building, Washington DC 20515, (202) 225-2061

- **Find your Representative here:**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tNhdclcADPMfFL2c1V6iF\\_NDxATh0A\\_WLxzMt2Tlwm0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tNhdclcADPMfFL2c1V6iF_NDxATh0A_WLxzMt2Tlwm0/edit)

**URGE** support for H.R.92

- **Representative Carolyn B. Maloney** (D-NY), Chair, House Oversight and Reform Committee, 2157 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington DC 20515, (202) 225-5051

## HEALTH and HEALTHCARE

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/battle-protect-healthcare-workers-front-lines-coronavirus-pandemic/story?id=69625036>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-18/hospital-makes-face-masks-covid-19-shields-from-office-supplies>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/01/viral-masks/605761/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/03/19/hospital-workers-battling-coronavirus-turn-bandas-sports-goggles-homemade-face-shields-amid-shortages/>

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to expand, medical personnel across the country are facing dangerous (and embarrassing) shortages of basic medical supplies. The *Washington Post* reports that healthcare workers are having to improvise safety gear, using bandanas in place of face masks, and sports goggles in place of eye shields. There are also individual reports of medical workers using face masks for a week at a time, spraying them with bleach at the end of each work day in an effort to limit transmission. Campaigns are underway seeking donations of basic supplies from private citizens. Other campaigns have seamstresses sewing face masks at home for distribution to health-care sites. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**DECRY** the supply failures that have our healthcare workers using improvised safety gear and **DEMAND** an immediate increase in funding for and production of these supplies

- **Alex Azar**, Secretary of Health and Human Services, 200 Independence Ave. SW, Washington DC 20201, (877) 696-6775

- **Find your Senators here:**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fWPKEeiBUwv0vaiTGYGKO37TWU4aSULWvI5sgOo5YS4/edit>

• **Find your Representative here:**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tNhdelcADPMfFL2c1V6iF\\_NDxATh0A\\_WLxzMt2Tlwm0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tNhdelcADPMfFL2c1V6iF_NDxATh0A_WLxzMt2Tlwm0/edit)

**DONATE** or **MAKE** safety gear—start by checking out these web sites

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KuxmNIKy03Br3oBKOfSWB3WAwNXToYfjHGpLYUZ-0rA/edit>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tjmccue/2020/03/20/calling-all-people-who-sew-and-make-you-can-help-solve-2020-n95-type-mask-shortage/#73d0f4d34e41>

<https://www.providence.org/lp/100m-masks>

<https://costumecrazed.me/2020/03/20/diy-fabric-mask-cover-covid-19-ppe-helper/>

<https://www.instructables.com/id/AB-Mask-for-a-Nurse-by-a-Nurse/>

<https://so-sew-easy.com/face-mask-sewing-patterns/>

<https://www.virginiamercury.com/blog-va/virginia-general-assembly-caps-insulin-prices-at-50-a-month>

We've all read stories about people facing financial challenges whose health has been threatened by or who have died as a result of attempting to ration their insulin use as the prices for insulin skyrocket. In a move that should be an inspiration to every state, the Virginia General Assembly has passed legislation that would cap the cost of insulin for patients to \$50 a month. Now that many face decreased employment or unemployment due to the coronavirus pandemic, the difficulty of paying for medications like insulin has become even more challenging. This is true for other life-saving medications like EpiPens. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**ASK** your state legislators to take action now to cap the prices of insulin, EpiPens, and similar medications

• **Find Your State Legislators Here** [http://www.legislature.ca.gov/your\\_legislator.html](http://www.legislature.ca.gov/your_legislator.html)

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/baldwin/2020/03/14/ventilator-maker-we-can-ramp-up-production-five-fold/#a334f7b5e9a5>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/03/18/coronavirus-what-defense-production-act-trump-has-invoked/2865598001/>

The U.S. has the capacity to produce respirators and similar equipment at a rate much faster than it is currently doing, particularly now that Trump has invoked the National Defense Authorization Act, which allows him to order the ramping up industry to manufacture ventilators and other necessary medical equipment. This could have begun much sooner if the administration hadn't wasted two months or more minimizing the risk of the coronavirus rather than developing responses to it. According to an article in *Forbes Magazine* industry could easily produce five times the number of ventilators that are currently produced. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**CALL** for immediate action to assure that the maximum number of ventilators and supplies will be produced as quickly as possible and **EXPRESS** your anger over the administration's failure to take the threat of coronavirus seriously

- **Donald Trump**, the White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington DC 20500, (202) 456-1111

- **Alex Azar**, Secretary of Health and Human Services, 200 Independence Ave. SW, Washington DC 20201, (877) 696-6775

- **Find your Representative here:**

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tNhdelcADPMfFL2c1V6iF\\_NDxATh0A\\_WLxzMt2Tlwm0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tNhdelcADPMfFL2c1V6iF_NDxATh0A_WLxzMt2Tlwm0/edit)

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/18/2020-05012/strengthening-transparency-in-regulatory-science>

<https://www.ecowatch.com/epa-limits-science-public-health-2645395622.html>

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/03/04/super-tuesday-news-dump-epa-expands-rule-limiting-science-agency-can-use-make-public>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/climate/epa-science-trump.html>

<https://www.nationofchange.org/2020/03/07/epa-updates-plans-to-limit-use-of-science-in-decision-making/>

Via RLS at *News You May Have Missed*: While the media (and audiences) were distracted by primary results, the Trump administration published a rule change which would prohibit using scientific data to make decisions unless it was publicly available, according to *Common Dreams*. In the usual double-speak, the rule, called “Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science,” would exclude data based on proprietary information or personal health information. An early version received over 600,000 comments, most opposed to the “secret science” proposal, according to Nation of Change. As the *New York Times* pointed out in the fall, understanding the relationship between pollution and disease, for example, often depends on data obtained under circumstances when confidentiality was guaranteed; crucial information that we now depend on, such as the relationship between lead paint and behavioral issues in children, or between mercury emissions from power plants and development delay, was obtained using confidential medical data. As the head of the American Lung Association told the *New York Times*, “This means the E.P.A. can justify rolling back rules or failing to update rules based on the best information to protect public health and the environment, which means more dirty air and more premature deaths.” (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**COMMENT** officially on this proposed rule change and **SPEAK OUT** in defense of real science, which protects the identity and histories of individuals involved in studies [*Note: be sure to refer to Docket ID EPA-HQ-OA-2018-0259*]

• **EPA Docket Center**, Office of Research and Development Docket, Mail Code 28221T, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington DC 20460

[If you prefer, you can submit an online comment here (comment button in upper right corner): <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/18/2020-05012/strengthening-transparency-in-regulatory-science> ]

## HUMAN and CIVIL RIGHTS

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1585/all-actions>

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) expired in December, 2018. In April 2019, the House passed the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, H.R.1585, with strong bipartisan support. Since then the legislation has been languishing in the Senate “on general orders,” meaning Majority Leader McConnell has not even assigned it to a committee. (Write-up 3/20/2020)

**TELL** McConnell and your Senators that you want to see action on VAWA immediately

• **Senator Mitch McConnell** (R-KY), Senate Majority Leader, 217 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, (202) 224-2541

- **Find your Senators here:**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fWPKEeiBUwv0vaiTGYGKO37TWU4aSULWvi5sgOo5YS4/edit>