

Emergency Labor Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Respuesta laboral de emergencia sobre la crisis de COVID-19 ([Para leer en español, haga clic aquí.](#))

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Due to inaction by the federal government and other authorities, the COVID-19 pandemic has passed a tipping point in the United States, particularly in the northeast. This document aims to give voice to the immediate and long term needs of working people. With this document we are seeking to work in collaboration with the Connecticut labor and social justice movements, the unemployed, underemployed, and non-union to fight for a future where workers are not economically and medically devastated.

For this reason, extraordinary measures must be taken to slow the spread of the virus, to protect working people, and to care for everyone in our society. To date, despite numerous emergency declarations, these measures are not being pursued adequately.

As social distancing is an essential measure in slowing the spread of COVID-19, only those workers who absolutely need to be on the job away from home during this crisis in order to fulfill immediate and basic human needs should do so at this time. All others must either work from home or go on an indefinite leave **with full pay and benefits for the entire duration of the crisis**. Except for extreme circumstances, workers over 55, with compromised immune systems, or with other serious health problems which put them at high risk for serious COVID-19 infections should be given indefinite leave, again, with full pay and benefits for the entire duration of the crisis. Where individual employers do not have the financial means to pay workers on leave (mainly small businesses), state and federal government must step in and pay workers directly. Tipped, precarious, student, and gig workers must be paid for full-time work at union rates. More than ever, obtaining what working people need means fighting for everyone. As the pandemic has reminded us, an injury to one is an injury to all.

1. Those workers who remain on the job away from home:
 - a. Must be tested regularly once testing capacity meets patient needs, and be given all necessary protections (gloves, masks and other protective gear, especially for healthcare workers)
 - b. Must be given hazard pay. No less than triple-pay for those working with the public, (such as healthcare workers and service workers) and double-pay for those working in an environment separated from the general public.

- c. Must be provided with home childcare. Childcare workers must not be in a high risk group, not living with people in a high risk group, and must be given regular testing and safety protections.

2. Economic protections. As the crisis creates a variety of unforeseeable circumstances and personal emergencies (especially among the presently unemployed who have almost no chance of finding a job at this time), the following protections will be necessary to preserve the economic security of Connecticut residents:

- a. Suspend all medical billing of patients. Insurance companies, state and federal government must cover all medical expenses for all patients during the crisis.
- b. Suspend insurance company authorization of treatment to speed up care and free up precious time for medical workers.
- c. No insurance cancellation for unemployment or any other cause during the crisis.
- d. Moratorium on all evictions, foreclosures and utility shutoffs (including: water, electricity, heating, hot water and internet)
- e. Cancellation of rent payments
- f. Suspension of mortgage payments
- g. Suspension of utility payments (water, electricity, heat, hot water, internet) – Federal assistance for payments made after the epidemic
- h. Suspension of all personal debt payments, including but not limited to: medical, home mortgages, student loans, credit cards, vehicles.
- i. Suspension of property tax payments – federal assistance for payments made after the epidemic
- j. Suspension of personal insurance payments, including, but not limited to medical, home, car and rental.
- k. State and federal assistance for persons with financial emergencies unforeseen by this statement

3. Protection of rights.

- a. No suspension of any collective bargaining agreements or worker protections. From the start of this crisis, workers have had to fight employers to engage in practices that protect themselves and the larger society. Collective bargaining agreements and worker protections are essential safeguards for workers and the society at-large.
- b. Expand safety protections for health-care workers and other frontline workers.
- c. Enact an Emergency Temporary Standard
- d. No retaliation against workers for using paid leave.

- e. No racist attacks. No attacks on the LGBTQIA community. Viruses do not have nationalities, races or ethnicities. The crisis has been produced by decisions made by people in authority to place private profits over the lives of human beings. Attempts to tie specific national, racial and ethnic groups to the COVID-19 pandemic only allow those in positions of authority to redirect responsibility for the crisis onto vulnerable groups and to divide working people as well. Attempts now being made to attack and scapegoat LGBTQIA communities serve the same purpose. As the pandemic grows more severe, and as growing anger seeks an outlet, the more these attacks threaten to produce tragic consequences.
- f. Preserve and expand bereavement leave to three weeks per family member lost for all workplaces where it is lower.
- g. Unions must organize the unemployed in order to build the broadest possible base for defending our rights.
- h. Preserve and advance the rights of oppressed groups such as women, LGBTQIA workers, workers of color and the formerly incarcerated who are often employed in the informal economy and as low-wage workers.
- i. Protect the right to strike - including the right of emergency workers to strike for pay and equipment

4. Emergency reorganization and priority measures

- a. Immediate expansion of COVID-19 testing. Use academic labs such as those at UConn for testing purposes **now**. This includes identifying all possible testing suppliers.
- b. Reopen closed hospitals and nursing homes.
- c. Repurpose all available productive capacity towards production of personal protection equipment, medical equipment and other supplies needed during this crisis, including, but not limited to masks, ventilators and protective gear. Any private business withholding supplies or productive capacity, or otherwise interfering with this transition must be immediately nationalized for the sake of public health and safety.
- d. Train and recruit healthcare workers from related sectors on an emergency basis. Expedite certifications for support staff.
- e. Expand free home delivery of essential goods (through postal service and all other available means): including but not limited to food; medicine; cleaning, bathroom and sanitary items. Including an expanded “meals on wheels” program for the elderly. Suspension of all junk-mail (promotional mail)
- f. Suspension of homeless sweeps
- g. Release all detainees held on civil immigration violations.
- h. Suspend ICE raids, arrests and deportations

- i. Prevent deadly, catastrophic viral outbreaks in jails and prisons. Evacuate prisons and jails. At minimum: Release all imprisoned people not convicted of a crime (pre-bond-hearing); imprisoned persons up for parole or probation; all people imprisoned for non-violent offenses. If decisive measures are not taken now, an outbreak in prisons and jails could turn the facilities into death traps for all inside, including staff, likely producing a rapid expansion of the epidemic.
 - j. Emergency health-care services, protection measures and testing in jails and prisons.
 - k. Identify and inform the public about changes in the foster care system and wellness check services for children who may be at risk or are in abusive homes
 - l. Expand domestic violence hotlines provide emergency reporting outside of emergency rooms
 - m. Appropriate hotels for patients, persons escaping domestic abuse, homeless persons, elderly, and the formerly incarcerated who do not yet have a place to live.
 - n. Appropriate unused housing for people escaping domestic abuse, elderly, homelessness, recently released from incarceration, or facing other emergencies. Special attention should be given to LGBTQIA youth who experience high levels of homelessness more generally.
 - o. Provide free computers or tablets and internet access to families for distance learning.
 - p. Establish a centralized online site where residents can find all information relevant to the crisis and assistance.
 - q. No use of the crisis to push through reorganization and restructuring of workplaces, contracts, and laws to the detriment of working people.
5. Working people - especially many of the lowest paid workers - are risking everything to reduce harm caused by COVID-19 and to keep society functioning. They should not also have to pay for the cost of the emergency response. All of the above measures, and all others needed during this crisis can be paid for through the following measures:
- a. Emergency reallocation of funds intended for bond payments (state and federal)
 - b. Emergency taxes on the wealthiest, top income earners and corporations (state and federal)
 - c. Emergency fund reallocation from the defense budget (federal)

List of initial signers:

(for identification purposes only)

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Green Party CT
Central CT DSA

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