



March 19, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol, Room Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: California Response to the Covid-19 Outbreak

Dear Governor Newsom:

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU California) writes on behalf of our over 700,000 members to address the needs of our members, and the State of California at large, during this global COVID-19 outbreak. On March 4, 2020 you declared a State of Emergency in California. We write to offer support and guidance, informed by the direct experience and expertise of our members, as California moves to protect our communities suffering from this pandemic.

We are asking the State of California to take immediate direct action to protect workers during this crisis. Our members in industries such as health care, IHSS, child care, county safety net workers, airport workers, school employees, security officers, and janitors, to name a few, are truly on the front lines of this crisis. Our members are critical to the state, county, and health care system's response to COVID-19. First responders need additional support, particularly child care, so that they can focus on delivering the services the community needs during these extraordinary circumstances. Workers that are not directly involved in the response are often having their work change or hours cut, meaning many will miss out on wages and benefits creating additional financial strain and uncertainty for working families during this crisis.

As the COVID-19 continues to spread amongst our community, we must make sure we have a firm foundation in place to deal with the current circumstances without weakening our infrastructure so severely that our ability to recover as a State becomes compromised. As such, SEIU believes that we must move quickly with policy solutions that:

- Enhance the "Families First Coronavirus Response Act" H.R. 6201
- Enhance California worker protections
- Support frontline workers and remove barriers that delay the delivery of essential safety net benefits to those in need

More specifically, we call on the state to work with us in implementing the following, with the understanding that as this pandemic evolves and progresses, more policy solutions will have to be developed and implemented.

Enhance the “Families First Coronavirus Response Act” H.R. 6201

- Upon passage, extend the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to employers with over 500 employees. Including the requirement for two weeks (or 10 work days) of emergency paid sick leave and 12 weeks of job-protected emergency paid family and medical leave.
- Increase the wage replacement rate for Family Leave up to 90 percent for low wage workers. The federal bill provides a 2/3 wage replacement to care for a family member who is ill with coronavirus, to quarantine, or to seek a diagnosis or preventive care for coronavirus. This also applies to care for a child whose school has closed or whose child care provider is unavailable due to coronavirus.
- The bill provides for \$1 billion in 2020 for emergency grants to states for unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, including immediate funding to all states for staffing, technology, systems, and increased funding for states that experience an increase of 10 percent or more in their unemployment rate. However, we need to ensure all workers have a similar safety net in place regardless of immigration status.

Enhance California Worker Protections

- *Fill in the gaps for workers not currently covered by the safety net* - Expand eligibility for Unemployment Insurance (UI) to K-14 classified employees, family child care providers, and spouse and parent IHSS providers. Increase the maximum UI benefit from \$450 a week and consider not charging the employer's account for public health emergency related claims.
- Allow first responders, doctors, nurses, IHSS providers, and other health care workers to designate a person for Paid Family Leave (PFL) in order to care for a child. Provide an inclusive definition of family, so that workers can care for seriously ill grandparents, grandchildren, adult children, parents in law, and siblings.
- *Protect at risk workers* - Require Cal/OSHA to create industry specific guidelines that include avoiding transmission in high risk and frontlines industries such as amongst child care providers, county safety net workers, IHSS providers, airport workers, security officers, and janitors to name a few. Allow Cal/OSHA to require mandatory training in high risk industries. Require these industries to provide protective supplies such as masks, gloves and disinfectants.
- Extend deadlines for training requirements during the pandemic, such as the training requirements for school bus drivers who will likely be unable to re-certify during this critical period. Implement the Governor's temporary moratorium on evictions and foreclosures and utility shut offs due to non-payment caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. Work to expand this policy to vehicle habitation fees and impounds caused by the current crisis.
- *Protect the health and safety* - We must preserve health insurance coverage for workers who lose their coverage or are on leave through mandating that employers continue their health insurance for 6 months so workers can maintain their access to

medical care. Additionally, we should provide healthcare workers and first responders with hotel rooms close to work to relieve stress and protect their families from potential exposure. This strategy was employed in China and helped prevent the spread of COVID-19 to the families of this critical workforce.

- Significantly increase staffing at EDD to ensure workers can access the benefits to which they're entitled. We must also hold Corporations accountable for the increased burden on State Disability Insurance (SDI) and Unemployment Insurance (UI).
- *Increase job protections for workers impacted by this crisis* - Expand the California Family Rights Act (CFRA) eligibility to cover people for their own serious health condition and those caring for family members without regard to employer size, hours worked, or tenure requirements. Additionally, we need to expand the Family School Partnership Act to provide job-protected leave for the duration of emergency closures of schools/day care facilities during public health emergencies. Reduce the employee threshold requirement so it applies to all employees.

Support frontline workers and remove barriers that delay the delivery of essential safety net benefits to those in need

- Suspend IHSS electronic timesheet implementation deadlines. Expand paid sick leave days for IHSS providers that need more than the current eight hours allowed.
- *Create an emergency child care fund* - to ensure the children of first responders, doctors, nurses, other health care workers and workers providing essential services for the community at large are cared for during this crisis.
- *Temporarily relax provider to child ratios* so that providers are able to care for more kids during this crisis, especially as child care centers and schools close down.
- *Fund Family Resource Centers* for students with special needs, child care needs, and lack of access to the internet.
- Ensure there are no disruptions to the delivery of essential social safety net services including funding to increase staffing levels, allow overtime where appropriate, and waive administrative barriers such as in-person requirements, which often preclude access.

As an organization, we understand the magnitude of this pandemic; in many cases our workers are on the front lines helping to protect public health and safety. We believe it is critical to keep families safe and family budgets solvent during these times. Thus, we must expand upon any proposals coming out of Washington and ensure these protections apply to businesses of any size. Similarly, it is critical we fill in the gaps in our current safety net. This includes providing support for undocumented immigrants who are likely ineligible for unemployment insurance.

We ask that you consider all of these proposals, with the understanding that the situation on the ground is changing by the minute. We look forward to partnering with you to provide a robust response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Schoonover". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "B" and "S".

Bob Schoonover
President, SEIU CA State Council