



March 20, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

National emergencies require us to move beyond business as usual and come together as a nation. Our government must act with urgency. And leaders of the largest, most powerful corporations must look past their bottom lines to do what's right for all working people.

On behalf of millions of service and healthcare workers on the front lines of this crisis, we demand immediate action by major industries and corporations to secure the health, safety, and long-term economic well-being of America's workers, regardless of where they work, their race, their immigration status, or current healthcare coverage.

1. **Fully-funded, accessible healthcare for every worker, including paid leave and 100%-paid testing and treatment for COVID-19.** Corporations must provide full healthcare coverage to direct and franchise employees and contractors. Any uninsured person should automatically be enrolled in Medicaid. Every worker must be covered by permanent, comprehensive paid leave policies, providing immediate access to 12 weeks' leave at full pay for workers who are sick, mandated to stay home, or caring for loved ones.
2. **Job, wage, and economic security for every worker.** Establish industry funds to fully reimburse wages lost by workers whose hours or jobs have been cut or cut back. These funds must cover direct and franchise employees and contractors, compensate tipped workers at a rate of at least \$15 an hour, and provide regular payments. Industries must provide easily accessed emergency child care funds, debt-relief, and housing assistance.
3. **Immediate investment in the health and safety of every worker.** Provide emergency relief for states to hire and train healthcare workers and first responders, and expand healthcare, long term care, and child care coverage. Corporations and industries should take aggressive, immediate measures to ensure clean, safe, sanitary work environments and protection from infection during this health crisis, with continuing access to personal protective equipment and training.
4. **Working families at the center of every emergency relief package.** Elected leaders of every party must act to put the health, safety, and financial well-being of workers first. Any industry relief or bailout must prioritize healthcare and financial support for workers over executive pay, shareholders, or profits. Relief efforts must directly address the disproportionate impact of economic and health crises on Black, brown, Asian Pacific Islander, and immigrant workers.

To more fully address the needs of workers in early education setting, we are calling on you to address:

- Create an emergency child care fund to ensure the children of first responders, doctors, nurses, other healthcare workers and workers providing essential services for the community at large are cared for during this crisis.

To more fully address the needs of workers in the k-12 industry, we are calling on you specifically to address:

- Ensure staff are paid as they normally would be during school shutdowns.
- Provide appropriate protective equipment and safety training. Strictly enforce health and safety standards and ensure that proper protocols for diluting cleaning solutions are followed.
- Provide workforce funds to enable the rapid hiring and training of cleaning staff.



- Ensure all school employees are eligible for unemployment insurance.
- Provide meals for children who rely on free and reduced meals.
- Work with families of special needs students to coordinate and deliver care, particularly for families who must work and need backup care, and deliver distance learning 1:1 for these students.
- Provide stipend or hazard pay for employees who must work or volunteer to work during school closures.
- Require that districts provide a waiver during pandemic and a grace period afterwards for required training that employment or wages are dependent on and employees are unable to access currently.
- Waive any federal mandates related to required days and testing for the remaining school year.
- Ensure students who lack computer or internet access or are homeless are not disadvantaged relative to other students as districts implement distance learning.

To more fully address the needs of workers in the higher education industry, we are calling on you to specifically address:

- Issue guidance to states and localities to levy taxes on endowments and/or end state tax exemptions on endowment investment returns; and invest revenue/savings into public higher education especially into community colleges, which are a likely destination for people who lose their jobs as a result of the recession. Ensure that funds do not go to colleges that spend less than 50% of tuition revenue on instruction.
- Make federal student loan payments optional for the next 12 months and move to a program that cancels a significant portion of federal student debt for education workers including part-time faculty who teach more than two classes per semester, healthcare workers and other frontline emergency workers.
- Provide a fund for immediate professional development training for online instruction.
- Make available emergency campus housing to those students and campus workers who are homeless, have violent or immunocompromised households.
- Many campus professional and service workers are expected to remain on campus to provide needed services to students or keep campuses sanitary. These workers require sufficient protective gear, training and information on potentially dangerous chemicals and solvents used.
- Partner with higher education unions and associations, including instructional, professional, service and trades unions, to ensure that rapidly developing campus policies and government orders are informed by the workers responsible for ensuring the quality and safety of colleges and universities.

Protecting all workers is the patriotic and moral requirement of this moment, and always.

Signed,

Mary Kay Henry, International President
Service Employees International Union

Cc: Peter MacKinnon, President SEIU Local 509, Chair of SEIU Higher Education Council
Max Arias, President of SEIU Local 99, Chair of SEIU K-12 Council and Early Learning Council