

JUST HARVEST
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TO: The United States Congressional Delegation from Southwestern Pennsylvania
FROM: Concerned Southwestern Pennsylvania Organizations
DATE: Monday, December 7, 2020
RE: The need for immediate action on pandemic relief

We are in the midst of the worst surge so far of the historic COVID-19 pandemic. Despite promising news of forthcoming vaccines, public health experts predict that the infection rate won't be declining anytime soon and may even get worse. There have been 372,000 Pennsylvanians infected with the disease, many with lingering symptoms, and upwards of 10,000 deaths -- more than three times the number lost on September 11, 2001 -- in this state alone.

Yet tens of millions of Americans are still waiting for relief. According to the latest Census Household Pulse data, more than 1.3 million Pennsylvania households report they sometimes or often don't have enough to eat, including 338,000 households with children. Nearly half a million Pennsylvanian households -- one in five renters -- are behind on rental payments.

What has kept the hardship and suffering from being even worse are the relief measures that the federal government passed in the Spring. But without further action, many of them will expire before year's end, including two critical unemployment assistance programs (PEUC and PUA), the CDC's moratorium on evictions, student loan forbearance, and CARES Act grants to state and local governments. The signers of this letter have for months been doing all we can to respond to unprecedented need from those we serve, but we are bailing out a rapidly rising flood with buckets; we need the government to build a dam.

The last relief package that the Senate considered did not go nearly far enough to protect struggling Pennsylvania households and the economy. We urge you to pass a robust and comprehensive pandemic relief package that includes:

- extending the previously enacted COVID protections that are set to expire at the end of 2020;
- authorizing adequate unemployment insurance benefits for people who have lost their jobs;
- increasing SNAP benefits by 15% to help families put food on the table;
- providing emergency rental assistance to help families stay in their homes;

- offering childcare assistance so that parents have the safe, affordable childcare they need to be able to return to work when it's safe to do so;
- establishing emergency grants to help low-income households that were left out of previous packages or need additional help;
- \$32 billion for transit agencies to prevent service cuts, fare hikes, and system shutdowns so riders can continue to get to work in essential industries and access essential services; and
- delivering additional aid to state and local governments to prevent more job layoffs and cuts in critical services.

A new relief package that prioritizes these provisions would benefit Pennsylvania and the nation as a whole by making sure those who are currently struggling can buy food, keep a roof over their heads, and meet other basic needs. These investments will in turn support local economies and businesses, prevent further job losses, and strengthen the nation's recovery. We ask you to protect the health, well-being, and future of those you represent; do not leave for holiday break without addressing these urgent needs.

Thank you.

Signing organizations:

Just Harvest

Allies for Children

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) Pittsburgh Chapter

Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP)

Casa San Jose

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

Green Grocer

Grow Pittsburgh

Hill District Consensus Group

JFCS Squirrel Hill Food Pantry

Lawrenceville United

Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN)

Pittsburgh Food Policy Council

Pittsburghers for Public Transit

PUMP

Rainbow Kitchen Community Services

Restaurant Opportunities Centers United of Pennsylvania

Strength In Numbers Project Inc

Swissvale Community Action Committed

Team PSBG

The Building Block of Natrona

Wilksburg Community Ministry