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CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-220, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your leadership in working to address the public health crisis and global pandemic of Coronavirus. As Congress negotiates coronavirus relief efforts, the Members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) offer the following proposals to assist Black Americans for consideration in the next package of federal resources for individuals, families, businesses, and communities.

Revitalize the Black community.

It is often said that “When America catches a cold, Black America catches pneumonia.” That adage is sadly fortuitous during this pandemic. While the pains are deep across the national economy, they are deeper in Black communities already struggling with decades of federal divestment and a widening racial wealth gap. We must offer bold solutions that will directly assist people and revitalize the entire economy. We must:

- **Extend the data collection period for the 2020 Census Count to ensure an accurate count.** The Census provides over \$800 billion annually in federal resources to local communities. At present, the Census Bureau is reportedly behind on hiring workers due, in part, to fears of exposure to the virus. With low census staffing, we are now presented with the threat of massive census undercounts. Moreover, large swaths of communities are being displaced due to the coronavirus threat, from student bodies moving out of their dorms, to individuals in group quarters like senior nursing homes, to those in halfway houses and correctional facilities. We cannot run the risk of a census undercount due to this pandemic. The repercussions will last for a generation or more, long after we have conquered the challenge posed by COVID-19.

- **Make public health emergencies eligible for Major Disaster Declarations under the Stafford Act**, which would allow the full weight of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) disaster programs and resources to be applied to the current crisis, including individual assistance such as direct cash assistance for individuals;
- **Provide Support for working families** by providing all workers with access to paid sick days, paid family, and medical leave so those who are sick or need to take care of a loved one can do so without fear of losing their job or paycheck;
- **Require a 90-day moratorium on all consumer and small business credit payments (student loans, credit cards, mortgages, car notes, small business loans, personal loans, etc.)**, which would enable Americans experiencing hardship to weather the crisis by suspending debt payments for the duration of this pandemic at a time when many Americans are confined to their homes and unable to work or bring in income;
- **Provide a nationwide moratorium on utility shut offs;**
- **Provide an "above-the-line" or universal charitable deduction for contributions through the end of 2021;**
- **Provide \$4 billion in Community Service Block Grants** to support a wide range of community-based activities to reduce poverty, with priority funding for nonprofits;
- **Support minority depository institutions (MDIs)** by requiring the Federal Reserve to temporarily provide zero percent interest rate loans to MDIs and make grant funding available to MDIs to invest in technology upgrades that will allow their clients virtual access to critical banking services;
- **Provide the Minority Business Development Agency with \$3 billion** to minimize the economic impacts on minority-owned businesses and support full implementation of the Initiative to Build Growth Equity Funds for Minority Businesses;
- **Provide \$50 billion in new grants for the Small Business Administration (SBA)** to assist negatively affected small businesses, including minority- and women-owned businesses;
- **Reauthorize the State Small Business Credit Initiative and provide \$10 billion;**
- **Authorize grants to small businesses for payroll support;**
- **Provide support for small businesses** by providing government-backed interest-free loans to businesses, entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and independent contractors to cover operating expenses and payroll needs in order to keep their employees fully employed;
- **Provide a rebate for 100 percent of payroll taxes** paid by small businesses this year, and provide a rebate of 200 percent of payroll taxes paid by small businesses in "hot spots;"
- **Provide emergency funding through grants to support investments in technology, cybersecurity, and resilience by small businesses owned by minorities, women and veterans;**

- **Provide \$82 billion in rural broadband funding** for the deployment of secure and reliable broadband for needy communities nationwide, spurring much needed economic development for rural communities that have been left behind with respect to broadband;
- **Provide relief to Black Farmers by relieving any outstanding indebtedness arising from the settlement of claims successfully brought by African American farmers against the United States Department of Agriculture for discrimination, where the government was found to be at fault;**
- **Provide credit to small farmers;**
- **Prioritize minority press for US government advertising contracts;**
- **Provide \$100 million for workforce and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to support the United States Postal Service; and**
- **Hold corporations accountable** by requiring that any employer that receives government assistance must provide all employees with paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, comprehensive insurance coverage, and strong worker protections and prevent any employer receiving government assistance from providing golden parachutes or exorbitant bonuses to its senior management or chief executive officer.

Ensure quality health care.

Our healthcare system is increasingly overwhelmed by the influx of Coronavirus patients. We must act swiftly to ensure families have access to the healthcare they need and to ensure healthcare workers have the resources they need to serve their communities safely. We must:

- **Provide \$60.1 billion for Community Health Centers, the National Health Service Corps, Teaching Health Centers Graduate Medical Education program.** In 1965, Congress authorized Community Health Centers (CHCs) to serve low-income populations. Though underfunded, CHCs have provided quality health care for the past 55 years. In 2010, Congress enacted the Affordable Care Act, which created the Community Health Center Fund. The CHC Fund has enabled centers to provide quality health care to low-income individuals. However, the program does not extend into every low-income qualified community. We authorize funding to establish CHCs in every eligible community and expand the capacity for existing centers to continue to operate and serve new patients that will seek services due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This expansion would also include much needed mental health services to those affected by the pandemic. Specifically, H.R. 1943, the Community Health Center and Primary Care Workforce Expansion Act of 2019, would:
 - Reauthorize Community Health Centers and the National Health Service Corp for 5 years with a 10 percent increase each year. (\$47.7 billion);
 - Address the immediate needs of CHCs during the COVID-19 crisis and provide resources to prepare for future emergencies (\$3.4 billion immediately, \$1 billion in emergency funds per year for 5 years for a total of \$8.4 billion); and
 - Improve overall access to health care, increase the mental health workforce, and improve access to telemedicine (\$3.9 billion).

- **Increase assistance to rural hospitals** and increase funding and flexibility to help open or refurbish new medical facilities in rural areas;
- **Ensure coverage of treatment, therapies, and vaccines for coronavirus without cost-sharing for all Americans;**
- **Support immediate health care coverage for foster youth** and extend Medicaid to 26 for youth who exited foster care to a kinship guardianship;
- **Provide tax credits for doctors, nurses, and other allied health professionals** who come out of retirement to provide much-needed care during the COVID-19 crisis;
- **Provide tax credits for manufacturers of ventilators, masks, and other resources** needed to serve COVID-19 patients and keep health care professionals safe; and
- **Provide both funding and flexibility to address the surge in mental health needs** related to coronavirus.

Protect our students and our educational institutions.

The Coronavirus pandemic is posing a major challenge to educational institutions as social distancing practices necessarily take place. We must ensure equal access to a quality education by providing support to both students, teachers, and our institutions. We must:

- **Provide \$3 billion in emergency funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) and Minority Serving Institutions.** *“For an additional amount for “Title III and Title V institutions”, \$3,000,000,000*, to remain available until expended, to provide funding to these institutions for the transition to a complete online learning, teaching, and servicing platform for faculty, staff, and students: Provided, That such amounts shall be used to allow these institutions to purchase and improve their infrastructure for Internet or other distance education technologies, including the purchase of technological devices to be used by faculty, staff, and students: Provided further, That such amounts shall be used to allow these institutions to support students who are in need of transportation, housing, food, counseling, mental health, and other adaptive living requirements: Provided further, That such amounts may be used to allow these institutions to prevent the spread of SARS–CoV–2 or COVID–19 on their campuses and surrounding areas: Provided further, That such amounts may be used to waive the interest and defer payments on outstanding loan amounts owed to the Secretary of Education: Provided further, That the Secretary shall modify the authorized activities in Title III, Title V, and Title VII, Part A, Subpart 4 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to allow for these institutions to use recent awards to address the needs mentioned in this paragraph: Provided further, That such amount is designated by the Congress as being for an emergency requirement pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(i) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.”*
- **Provide funding to assist educational institutions** with planning for closures, including how to provide meals to students, how to ensure proper cleaning and sanitation, and help to coordinate eligible entities’ preparedness and response efforts with public health departments and other relevant agencies;

- **Provide funding for financial aid, including Pell, (similar to provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) to support students unexpectedly impacted by school closures, including student loan relief for borrowers;**
- **Provide additional funds for Subpart 1, Part D of Title II of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* for McKinney-Vento grants to states to support their identified homeless students;**
- **Provide additional funds for Subpart 2 of Part A of Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* for financial assistance to high-poverty school districts and schools;**
- **Provide additional funding for the expansion of broadband access to ensure all students, including those in urban and rural communities have access to tele-learning opportunities;**
- **Provide resources for student housing, as many college students living in dormitories need immediate resources to find alternative housing;**
- **Allocate resources for colleges that stay open for students in need, such as foster youth, international students, and low-income students;**
- **Provide \$1 billion in support for Head Start;**
- **Provide \$4 billion in childcare funding to reduce the strain on families;**
- **Grant debt cancellation and immediate relief for millions of people already crushed by record levels of student debt, which would help stimulate the economy when we need it the most.**

Protect incarcerated individuals.

Millions of currently incarcerated individuals are at risk of COVID-19 without the ability to take any steps to protect themselves. They are our responsibility and we must take actions to ensure their health and safety. Unlike the general population, correctional staff, personnel, and incarcerated persons cannot practice social distancing due to overcrowding and the restrictive nature of detention facilities. As a result of close confinement, the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in these facilities remains high. Measures must be immediately implemented to protect the lives of the men, women, and youth who are currently in custody and the newly arrested, as well as to protect the staff and personnel who are responsible for their care. We must:

- **Release all juveniles who have committed a non-violent crime;**
- **Ensure all incarcerated individuals and staff are tested for Coronavirus, including everyone in custody, those going into custody, and those who are scheduled for immediate release;**
- **Prioritize releasing incarcerated individuals in prisons, jails, and detention centers through clemency, commutations and compassionate release;**
- **Allow immediate temporary release to home confinement of individuals who are a low-risk threat to the community, but to whom COVID-19 is a high-risk threat, which should**

automatically include (1) pregnant women, (2) adults over the age of 55, and (3) those with serious medical conditions, but could extend to those who are near to completing their sentence, low risk offenders, and those who have not begun their sentence, unless they pose a risk of serious injury to a reasonably identifiable person;

- **Provide \$4 billion for Second Chance Grants**, with priority given to community based non-profit organizations, to ensure individuals released from custody have the resources needed to successfully reintegrate into their communities;
- **Limit transmission in Bureau of Prisons (BOP), State and local correctional facilities** by immediately providing the resources necessary to implement CDC protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as functioning sinks with antibacterial soap, hand sanitizers, and unlimited paper towels, increasing laundry services for clothing and bedding, as well as instituting measures to protect individuals responsible for providing laundry and cleaning services;
- **Agree that solitary confinement is not medical care and establish a Medical Emergency Plan with designated housing areas**, including the tracking all suspected cases of COVID-19 and available hospital beds and necessary equipment, the hiring of medical professionals capable of responding to COVID-19 inside facilities, and the development of a plan to transfer those who need intensive care to hospitals;
- **Employ technology to preserve families and their visitation needs**, including providing video conferencing and calls free of charge; and
- **Provide Paid Sick Leave for personnel** who are unable to work as a result of exposure to COVID-19 and require the establishment of an emergency contingency plan for the effective operation of facilities.

Maintain access to the ballot.

2020 is a critical year for the Black community, as we face unprecedented voter suppression efforts on the scale of invited foreign interference in our elections. There is growing concern that seniors, college students, and communities of color may be the most impacted in the 2020 election cycle due to the coronavirus pandemic, with the increased likelihood of people having limited ability to get to polling stations. We must act to maintain access to the ballot despite the challenges presented by this pandemic. Specifically, we must:

- **Restore Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965** to counter voter suppression tactics in the 2020 election cycle;
- **Prohibit the postponement or cancellation of any election**, and instead require every state to implement a vote-by-mail system as soon as possible, but no later than 30 days before the November 2020 General Election date;
- **Establish a National Vote-By-Mail system for all remaining primaries and the general election** featuring no-excuse vote by mail with prepaid postage, a postmarked deadline of Election Day, the ability for third parties to collect and return sealed ballots, and the expeditious notification of and ability to cure any signature matching issues prior to the balloting deadline; and

- **Provide robust funding for elections and election infrastructure**, including funds for the recruitment and training of poll workers to address potential staffing shortages, community outreach and education to expand absentee voting access, the development and/or expansion of absentee registration and balloting, the development of drive-through voting centers, and prepaid postage for absentee ballots and vote-by-mail.

Preserve housing and combat homelessness.

People without housing are among the most vulnerable populations during this Coronavirus pandemic. We must take immediate action to ensure those with housing can remain sheltered through this crisis, while creating new housing opportunities for the millions of homeless Americans across this country. We must:

- **Provide \$290 million for Fair Housing Enforcement**, including \$200 million for the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity and \$90 million to ensure that fair housing organizations and state and local agencies have sufficient resources to deal with an expected surge in fair housing complaints, including pandemic-related financial scams that target protected classes;
- **Ban all evictions, foreclosures, and repossessions** – including manufactured homes, RVs, and cars nationwide – to ensure that people can safely quarantine in their homes, if necessary;
- **Require forbearance for mortgages on rental properties** to the extent that owners of rental properties continue to have trouble servicing their debt during the suspension of rental and payment and evictions, even with the rental assistance fund;
- **Provide \$10 billion for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)**, with a waiver on the amount of CDBG funds that can be spent on services, including for funds that have previously been appropriated, to allow state and local governments to have a flexible resource to address the needs of their communities when mitigating the impacts of COVID-19, including establishing teams to perform mobile testing of vulnerable populations, such as people experiencing homelessness, delivering meals to people with mobility issues, and purchasing cleaning supplies;
- **Suspend the Work and Community Service Requirements in Federal Housing Programs and the ban on formerly incarcerated;**
- **Provide \$300 million for Servicer Coordinators to assist elderly households** under the Service Coordinator Grant program, which supports seniors and people with disabilities living in HUD-assisted housing and will need additional funding to ensure medical and other services are provided to elderly residents who are the most vulnerable to the health impacts of the virus;
- **Provide up to \$5 billion in additional funds for the McKinney-Vento Emergency Solutions Grant** program to provide formula grants to states, large cities, and counties to fund rapid re-housing, prevention programs, and emergency shelters; and
- **Provide \$5 billion in emergency homeless assistance** to enable state and local governments to finance housing and health related services including by paying for emergency use of hotels and motels, for the many people who are experiencing homelessness, and as a result, are at greater risk of contracting the disease.

Safeguard the Social Safety Net.

Now more than ever, we must safeguard the social safety net for those most vulnerable among us. We must:

- **Provide funding to school districts, food banks, and local non-profit and faith-based organizations for the direct delivery of non-congregate meals to households with children;**
- **Increase the reach of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):**
 - **Increase SNAP benefits** during this public health emergency similar to the 13.6% increase in SNAP benefits under American Recovery and Reinvestment Act;
 - **Provide additional SNAP administrative funds to States** for the remainder of the fiscal year;
 - **Expand CR-SNAP** to increase program eligibility, similar to D-SNAP;
 - **Expand SNAP eligibility to college students in need;**
 - **Waive all SNAP work requirements** under section 6 of the *Food and Nutrition Act* of 2008;
 - **Authorize the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to waive the hot foods requirement under SNAP;**
 - **Explicitly authorize USDA to expand the online SNAP pilot nationwide;**
 - **Provide funding to support delivery of food to homebound SNAP participants**, including seniors and persons with disabilities, by non-profit and faith-based organizations;
 - **Temporarily suspend restrictions on the statutory outreach requirements** in the 2014 Farm Bill and provide additional funds for outreach and application assistance for non-profit organizations;
 - **Block USDA from finalizing or implementing rules related to Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents, Broad Based Categorical Eligibility and the Standard Utility Allowance;**
 - **Block implementation of the final public charge rule;**
 - **Waive the restriction on formerly incarcerated individuals receiving SNAP;**
 - **Provide additional money for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program** (*formally FINI*) for online delivery of fresh fruits and vegetables purchased with SNAP benefits;
- **Provide funding to support the delivery of commodities to homebound households under FDPIR and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program;**

- **Provide at least a twelve-month moratorium on enforcement of work requirements for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF);**
- **Waive the restriction on formerly incarcerated individuals receiving TANF;**
- **Waive the restriction on formerly incarcerated individuals receiving HUD housing assistance;**
- **Provide exemptions to use Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards at restaurants in food deserts; and**
- **Ensure that federal stimulus support does not count as assets and negatively impact eligibility for federal assistance programs.**

Keep people moving.

A key component to our economy is our transportation infrastructure. We must:

- **Provide \$16 billion to help public transit systems** impacted by reduced ridership and higher cleaning expenses; and
- **Provide protections for transportation workers**, from airline and airport workers, air traffic controllers, and TSA agents, to public transit workers.

Fund Science, Research, and Development.

This global pandemic requires an army of scientists and researchers to combat it. We must:

- **Provide \$50 million in supplemental funding to NSF's Rapid Response Research** mechanism to rapidly fund quick-response research related to COVID-19 to support near real-time research at molecular, cellular, physiological, and ecological, and social levels to better understand coronavirus characteristics such as genetics, modes of action, transmission, virulence and population dynamics;
- **Provide \$34 million to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Homeland Security research program** to support their ongoing response work to COVID-19;
- **Provide \$20 million in funding to support ongoing intramural research activities at EPA** in all six research programs that may be disrupted by COVID-19;
- **Provide \$10 million for new intramural EPA research** on virus exposure pathways and the environmental, public health, and climate impacts of socio-economic slowdown;
- **Provide \$10 million for ongoing extramural research** activities previously funded through the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) grants that may be disrupted by COVID-19; and

- **Provide \$10 million for new STAR grants to fund extramural research** on virus exposure pathways and the environmental, public health, and climate impacts of socio-economic slowdown.

Preserve foreign ops funding.

While we work to address this pandemic at home, we must not forget our allies abroad. We must:

- **Ensure the State Department is coordinating with Caribbean and Western Hemisphere governments** to enhance their COVID-19 capabilities;
- **Provide \$15 Million to assist African countries in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic through existing programs**, including assistance with strengthening existing public health and medical systems, improved screening at ports of entry, increased testing, and combating the spread of COVID-19 among refugee populations; and
- **Provide \$5 million for the Development Finance Corporation** to expedite loans for small and medium-sized U.S. businesses operating overseas impacted by COVID-19.

Again, thank you for your leadership on behalf of the American people during this daunting global health crisis. We look forward to working with you to advance another Coronavirus response package that meets the specific needs of Black families and businesses.

Sincerely,



Rep. Karen Bass
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

cc:

House Majority Whip James Clyburn
House Democratic Caucus Chair Hakeem Jeffries
Steering and Policy Committee Co-Chair Barbara Lee
House Agriculture Committee
House Committee on Appropriations
House Armed Services Committee
House Committee on the Budget
House Education and Labor Committee
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
House Committee on Financial Services
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
House Committee on Homeland Security
House Committee on the Judiciary
House Natural Resources Committee
House Committee on Oversight and Reform

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
House Committee on Small Business
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House Ways & Means Committee