

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Committee on Rules &
Administration
Russell 305
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Rules &
Administration
Russell 305
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson
Committee on House
Administration
Longworth 1309
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on House
Administration
Longworth 1309
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Klobuchar, Chairperson Lofgren & Ranking Member Davis:

As the United States mobilizes to respond to the recent outbreak and spread of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, we urge you to take into consideration the well-being of all of Legislative Branch employees, including contract workers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) put out a public health response to a potential coronavirus disease outbreak in the United States that included recommendations for social distancing.¹ The CDC is urging Americans to stay home when ill, work remotely, and seek medical care when infected. Out of an abundance of caution, workers who have had contact with confirmed COVID-19 patients have also been instructed to self-quarantine. In many contexts, employers have reduced operations, encouraging workers to stay at home on special leave prompted by the pandemic. Contract workers are critical to the daily function of the Capitol complex and surrounding buildings – a facility that hosts three to five million visitors each year. Approximately 60% of those visitors come to the Capitol complex between March and July.²

As The New York Times recently noted, however, following the CDC's recommendations in response to the potential spread of the coronavirus is a luxury some workers can't afford.³ Some workers may simply not be able to follow these recommendations without experiencing some kind of financial hardship. Given the Legislative Branch's extensive reliance on contract workers for a range of functions, including food service and janitorial work, we write

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 24, 2020. "Public Health Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak." Retrieved: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6908e1.htm>

² Laura Trivers, "By the Numbers: Capitol Visitor Center," *Architect of the Capitol* (June 21, 2018). Retrieved: <https://www.aoc.gov/blog/by-numbers-capitol-visitor-center>

³ Miller, Claire Cain, Sarah Kliff, and Margot Sanger-Katz. March 1, 2020. "Avoiding Coronavirus May Be a Luxury Some Workers Can't Afford." *The New York Times*. Retrieved:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/upshot/coronavirus-sick-days-service-workers.html>

to urge that you attempt to address the potential financial hardship for these workers if they have to self-quarantine due to COVID-19 or in the event the Congress adjourns for a prolonged state work period as a social distancing measure.

Based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) on benefits provision, service sector workers are likely some of the most vulnerable workers during a potential spread of the coronavirus. We know, for example, that only 44% of service sector workers, 23% of part-time workers, and 37% of workers in the bottom quartile of wages have access to a healthcare plan.⁴ A majority of these workers also tend to work without access to paid leave. Only 43% of service sector workers, 23% of part-time workers, and 56% of workers in the bottom quartile of earnings have access to some type of paid leave.⁵ This last statistic is particularly salient for public health reasons because we know that more than 43% of workers in the bottom quartile needed to take leave in 2018 for their own illness or medical care and didn't take it.⁶ Over 60% of those part-time and lowest-wage workers felt they did not have enough leave, could not afford the loss of income, feared negative employment repercussions, or simply did not have access.⁷

We encourage you to consider ensuring any workers who follow novel coronavirus-related guidance from public health authorities—including directives to be tested, self-quarantine, or take other “social distancing” measures—have some financial forbearance. While we are pleased that the Architect of the Capitol has directed contractors to provide paid administrative leave to any worker that has been confirmed to have COVID-19, we believe more expansive accommodations must be established to protect the public health and ensure workers don't experience significant financial hardship in the wake of guidance from public health authorities.

Again, we strongly urge that you attempt to address the potential financial hardship for Congress' support workforce if they have to self-quarantine during this time or have their work schedules unexpectedly disrupted as the result of changes to congressional operations. In order to limit the spread of COVID-19, Congress must lead by example by committing that economic uncertainty will not deter these dedicated public servants from following public health guidance during the response.

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019. “Table 9. Healthcare benefits: Access, participation, and take-up rates, private industry workers, March 2019.” Bureau of Labor Statistics Employee Benefits Survey 2019. Retrieved: https://www.bls.gov/news/ebs/benefits/2019/ownership/private_table09a.pdf

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019. “Table 6. Employed persons working at home, workplace, and time spent working at each location by full- and part-time status and sex, jobholding status, and educational attainment, 2018 annual averages.” Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey 2018. Retrieved: https://www.bls.gov/news.release.atu.t06.htm#tus_tu_nr6.f.1

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019. “Table 7. Workers who needed to take leave from their jobs but did not take it: reasons for needing to take leave by selected characteristics, averages for the period 2017-2018.” Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey 2018 - 2017-18 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module. Retrieved: https://www.bls.gov/news.release.atu.t06.htm#tus_tu_nr6.f.1

⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019. “Table 8. Workers who needed to take leave from their jobs but did not take it: reasons for not taking leave by selected characteristics, averages for the period 2017-2018.” Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey 2018 - 2017-18 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module. Retrieved: https://www.bls.gov/news.release.atu.t06.htm#tus_tu_nr6.f.1

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to working together on this critical issue moving forward.

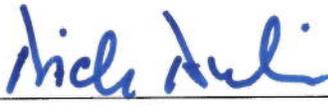
Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator