

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 18, 2020

Governors and State Workforce Administrators:

We write today to thank you for your efforts to support workers during the unprecedented situation due to the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). As we continue our efforts to provide federal assistance during these challenging times, we want to encourage you to do whatever is within your existing authorities to support workers facing hardship due to lost hours or jobs, sickness, family caretaking responsibilities, and other COVID-19-related circumstances.

Given the unique nature of the pandemic we are facing, we encourage you to take advantage of recently enacted federal legislation that increases resources for states to deliver timely unemployment insurance benefits to affected workers. The legislation should make it easier for workers to access unemployment benefits by waiving waiting weeks and work search requirements, as well as experience ratings for employers. Given these unavoidable circumstances, employers should not be penalized for encouraging their workers to receive unemployment compensation and workers should be able to access compensation immediately, particularly when other work opportunities may not be available. This is not only a matter of economic security but one of public health, as workers who cannot access unemployment benefits are likely to try and find work even when the costs to public health may be severe.

We are also especially concerned about the hardships facing workers who do not meet the eligibility requirements for unemployment benefits, including so-called “gig workers” or other non-traditional workers that generally receive 1099 income as either a primary or secondary source of earnings. Many of these workers are not eligible for unemployment insurance, paid leave, sick leave, and other benefits that traditional, full-time workers typically receive from their employers, as well as workers who earn a large share of their incomes from tips. We continue to push for passage of Senator Wyden and Senator Peters’ Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Act, which is modeled on the Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) program, and would ensure that gig workers and contractors are covered. However, given the severity of the crisis, we ask you to do whatever is possible to extend support to workers who do not fit into the usual framework of unemployment compensation. It is critical that there be no delay in using your existing authorities to support these workers to the greatest extent possible.

An effective response to COVID-19 will require a collaborative effort at the federal, state, and local levels of government and we stand ready to assist you in carrying out these critical efforts to protect public health while supporting workers through the economic shocks of the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Gary Peters
United States Senator

CC: Mr. Bill McBride, Executive Director, National Governors Association

CC: Mr. Scott Sanders, Executive Director, National Association of State Workforce Agencies