

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

COMMITTEES:  
FINANCE

BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS

BUDGET

INTELLIGENCE

RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

March 6, 2020

Bastian Lehmann  
CEO, Postmates  
201 3rd St,  
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Lehmann:

As the United States mobilizes to respond to the recent outbreak and spread of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, I write to urge you to publicly commit to prioritizing your workers' economic security and the broader public health during this response.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently put out a public health response to a potential coronavirus disease outbreak in the United States that included recommendations for social distancing.<sup>1</sup> The CDC is urging Americans to stay home when ill, work remotely, and seek medical care when infected. As The New York Times recently noted, however, following the CDC's recommendations in response to the potential spread of the coronavirus can often be a luxury some workers can't afford.<sup>2</sup> Some workers may simply not be able to follow these recommendations without experiencing some kind of financial hardship. I write to urgently ask that you attempt to address the potential financial hardship for your workers if they are sick or have to self-quarantine during this time.

As The Washington Post recently wrote, gig workers – and contingent workers more broadly – are likely the most vulnerable workers to a potential spread of the coronavirus.<sup>3</sup> They may be working without access to a healthcare plan or paid sick leave. As a consequence, they're not likely to follow the CDC's coronavirus recommendations. They may not go to the doctor when they are sick for lack of insurance and they may not stay home due to loss of income. In fact, they may increase their workload during a potential coronavirus outbreak. If broader segments of the American labor force opt to work remotely, food and supply delivery workers may be asked to increase their workload to serve additional home delivery requests.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 24, 2020. "Public Health Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak." Retrieved: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmnwr/volumes/69/wr/mmm6908e1.htm>

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> Tiku, Nitasha. March 2, 2020. "Gig workers face the spread of the new coronavirus with no safety net." The Washington Post. Retrieved: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/02/29/gig-workers-face-spread-new-coronavirus-with-no-safety-net/>

Recently, Postmates offered recommendations for how workers can protect themselves during a potential spread of coronavirus.<sup>4</sup> Postmates specifically shared CDC guidance with those carrying out deliveries and encouraged them to follow preventative measures such as washing their hands. Further, I appreciate that you recommended that workers stay home if they feel ill. While this is prudent and good advice, I have concerns that it does not address some broader challenges that workers could face.

I 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. One potential idea, for the sake of broader American public health concerns and the economic security of your workers, could be the creation of a special coronavirus health fund. In this unique circumstance, where COVID-19 poses a demonstrable broad public health threat, workers could tap into the fund when they need to get tested or self-quarantine. Another option could be to pay workers their regular average pay independent of whether they are able to meet their average hours worked during this time. A health emergency for which they bear no responsibility should not place an undue financial burden on workers and their families.

Again, I strongly urge that you attempt to address the potential financial hardship for your workers if they are sick or have to self-quarantine during this time. In order to limit the spread of COVID-19, it is critical that platform companies lead by example by committing that economic uncertainty will not be deterrents to their workers following public health guidance during the response.

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

Sincerely,



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Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

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<sup>4</sup> Madrigal, Alexis C. February 28, 2020. “The Gig Economy Has Never Been Tested by a Pandemic.” The Atlantic. Retrieved: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/02/coronavirus-gig-economy/607204/>