

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 5, 2020

Barry DuVal
President & CEO, Virginia Chamber of Commerce
919 E Main St. Suite 900
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Mr. DuVal,

As the United States mobilizes to respond to the recent outbreak and spread of COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, we write to urge your member companies to prioritize their employees' health, economic well-being, and security during this response. The companies you represent are some of the largest, most high profile companies in the United States. The broader business community watches their actions closely and we believe they have an opportunity, and an obligation, to lead in this moment.

As you may well know, the novel coronavirus has sickened more than 93,000 people around the world, and killed more than 3,000 people to date. While there have not been any identified cases of the virus in Virginia to date, this situation is rapidly evolving. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has said the potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is very high and the spread of the disease in other countries shines a light on the need for a whole-of-society response.¹ Much of the US response been appropriately focused on access to testing and medical care, with Congress poised to allocate substantial resources to fighting this virus. The Federal Reserve has also recently made a decision to cut interest rates in an effort to address any macroeconomic impacts. It is now vital that the broader business community follow suit by assuring workers that their own family's economic circumstances will not be negatively impacted by this crisis.

On March 3, 2020, the CDC issued interim guidance recommending that specific community actions be taken to limit exposure to the virus², on top of previously recommended community-based interventions in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, such as school dismissals, event cancellations, social distancing, and remote work for employees.³ While the spread of COVID-19 is likely to affect different individuals, families, and communities differently, it is increasingly likely that a significant number of Virginians will need to practice social distancing in some way. No one should be penalized by their employer or put in any financial duress for following CDC guidance.

To that end, we encourage your more than 26,000 Virginia member companies to commit to ensure that any Virginia employees or contractors who follow novel coronavirus-related guidance from public health authorities can count on basic protections like preservation of their employment status and basic financial forbearance. In particular, we are interested in understanding how your member companies will specifically make clear that:

- Employees will not lose their job should they have to self-quarantine or practice social distancing, or because of family obligations, such as staying home to care for a sick child or family member.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fpreparing-individuals-communities.html

- People who are placed under quarantine and unable to work will not be forced to deplete their sick and annual leave, or report for work when such leave is exhausted.
- Employees will have access to flexible scheduling options, such as telework and generous, previously unscheduled leave, if they are unable to report to work.
- Employers will provide financial assistance to their employees and help them meet their financial obligations in the event of a sustained or widespread disruption due to COVID-19.

In addition, we ask that member companies work with health insurance providers to ensure workers can affordably access the preventive care and treatment they may need as a result of COVID-19. Virginians should be able to take recommended measures to protect their health and that of more vulnerable members of their communities without facing negative economic consequences.

We look forward to swiftly hearing from you about what steps your member companies will take to support their employees and limit transmission of the coronavirus without fear of negative economic consequences. Ensuring appropriate containment of COVID-19 is a community effort, and it is imperative that the Virginia Chamber's member companies lead the businesses community in prioritizing workers' mental and physical well-being.

Further, it is our hope that your companies will also step up to ensure your contractors and the companies in your supply chain are taking these important steps. We must ensure that workers with particularly vulnerable statuses know that they can do what is recommended to protect themselves, their families, and the public without fear of negative consequences.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. We are anxious to hear your response.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator