

PRESS RELEASE



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Unions Representing Nearly 20 Million Workers Tell Congress: ‘Wake Up to What is Happening’ and Prioritize Paid Leave in Next Relief Bill

WASHINGTON – In a new letter today, the Paid Leave for All campaign and five of the nation’s largest labor unions—who collectively represent nearly 20 million workers—are urging House and Senate leaders to extend and expand federal paid leave benefits for workers into 2021, writing that, “Six months after the first case was diagnosed on U.S. soil, we are still facing a limited supply of tests that take weeks for returned results, a lack of PPE for frontline workers, people of color dying at disproportionate and alarming rates, and parents who cannot safely send their children to school.”

The **American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)**, **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**, **Communications Workers of America (CWA)**, **National Education Association (NEA)**, and **Service Employees International Union (SEIU)** are joining the **Paid Leave for All campaign** to say that, instead of focusing on what is needed to protect workers, students, school employees, and communities, Republican leadership in the Senate is looking for ways to prevent businesses from being held accountable if their employees get sick.

“Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s proposal for the next round of coronavirus relief prioritizes the ability of big corporations to avoid responsibility if their workers get sick on the job, instead of ensuring that everyday workers can access paid leave if they or their loved ones need it. It is dark irony that McConnell’s backwards plan also essentially admits the pressing need for robust paid leave: if workers weren’t in danger of getting sick, big businesses wouldn’t need this legal protection.

“We are hard pressed to think of a more harmful agenda than telling employers they won’t be held accountable when they force employees back onto the job even if their workplace is a coronavirus hot spot.”

The unions, which represent millions of teachers and other school personnel, also point out that the safe reopening of schools for in-person learning requires the extension and expansion of emergency paid leave to ensure benefits cover everyone.

“Giving parents the ability to care for a sick child at home and providing teachers and school support personnel, including cafeteria workers, custodial staff and others, the ability to take time off when ill is critical to stopping the virus,” **the unions wrote.**

Passed by the House in May, the HEROES Act would extend and expand federal emergency paid leave benefits to up to 106 million workers – many of whom are essential frontline staff who are disproportionately people of color. Between loopholes in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and regulations from the Department of Labor, millions of workers do not have the paid leave benefits needed to stay healthy, take care of others, and help stop the spread of COVID-19 in their communities.

“Congress needs to wake up to what is happening,” **the organizations wrote.** “Millions of workers are worrying about their health and their jobs and incomes while this virus wreaks havoc on our country. Never before have paid leave protections been more necessary. For businesses and schools to reopen in-person safely, we need to have confidence that people infected with the virus can stay home or else we’re all at risk of infection – and this means closing the gaps that cut millions of workers out of emergency paid sick and family leave protections. Meaningful paid leave that covers everyone is one of our best chances to stop the spread, allow us to safely reopen, and get the economy back on track.”

“Senate passage of the paid leave provisions included in the HEROES Act would close significant loopholes in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act that left up to 106 million workers without paid leave, including millions of frontline health care and essential workers who are putting their health at risk to keep us all safe. The benefits in the House-passed HEROES Act are an investment in this country’s future. Extending and expanding paid leave benefits is essential to strengthening the health and wellbeing of communities.”

The organizations that signed onto the letter are:

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
American Federation of Teachers
Communications Workers of America
National Education Association
Paid Leave for All
Service Employees International Union

The Paid Leave for All campaign is a growing collaborative of organizations fighting for paid family and medical leave for all working people.

For more information on the Paid Leave for All campaign, visit <https://paidleaveforall.org/>.

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