

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 30, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

In recent years, demographic shifts and wage stagnation have made it harder for people to manage work and care for their families. The COVID-19 pandemic has put our public health and collective wellbeing at risk in newly urgent ways. As schools, childcare programs, and community centers for seniors and people with disabilities are closed - and as hospitals and makeshift care centers exceed capacity -- the need for care at home has increased with the need to reduce potential exposure to coronavirus. Now more than ever, caregivers are under extra pressure to work and care for their families at home.

Over 52 million people are caregivers who provide care, services, and support to children, people with disabilities, sick adults, and seniors in their homes and communities. Of those, 33 million are unpaid primary family caregivers of seniors and people with disabilities, 11 million are sandwich generation caregivers who are simultaneously caring for a child and an adult, 4.5 million are direct care workers, 2.3 are domestic workers, and 2 million are childcare workers. Many of these caregivers are still working to keep our care systems going and to make it possible for other crisis responders to work. It is vital that we invest in home and community-based care infrastructure and that caregivers have the benefits and resources needed to fight COVID-19. The frontlines start at home and will remain there as we fight this pandemic for the long haul.

The first three COVID-19 relief bills largely overlooked the needs of caregivers and those whose care needs may be best served in their homes. This is why the upcoming relief bill should **establish “Family Care” for all essential workers and vulnerable family caregivers**. Family Care would expand paid sick, medical, and family leave; provide access to affordable childcare; provide affordable physical and mental health care; ensure supports for the caregiving of seniors and people with disabilities; and provide cash assistance to offset the unexpected costs required to safely respond to COVID-19. As part of Family Care, the federal government should **establish a one-stop web portal and app** for essential workers to access information, find resources, assess eligibility for various programs, and apply for benefits.

The upcoming relief bill should also **adopt an expansive definition of who is an essential worker, including all workers like home health aides and early education and childcare workers who must go to work during this pandemic**. As such, they should:

1. Be paid a living wage, including hazard pay for care services;
2. Be trained on COVID-19 care and have access to free personal protective equipment as necessary, and mobile and home tests if ever available;

3. Have access to affordable health care that includes testing, treatment, telehealth, and mental health services; and
4. Receive Family Care benefits.

Relief legislation also needs to **significantly bolster and invest in our existing child and home care infrastructure**, which were already operating at a financial and structural deficit prior to the pandemic. This is necessary to prevent a system-wide infrastructure collapse, support frontline workers and caregivers, and prepare to meet the needs of working people during the recovery. We must provide funding to allow child care providers who are closed to cover their operational costs, including continuing to pay their staff, and ensure that across all of the investments, sufficient public funding must be provided so that the burden of cost does not fall on either care providers or families. We must also fund home and community-based transition planning for seniors and people with disabilities who are at high-risk and currently in institutional settings. We must also provide monthly flexible benefits to people who need care to cover unexpected and emerging needs such as grocery and meal delivery, and to address the acute worker shortage, give grants to community-based organizations to recruit new care workers and quickly train and deploy them.

The gross inequality and fragmented nature of our social safety nets and health care systems is starker than ever, and nowhere is it more glaring than in the lack of support for our nation's caregivers. Our care infrastructure must be reinforced so it is stronger for elders, families, children, people with disabilities, childcare providers, and caregivers who are in danger of losing their lives and livelihoods from the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. The stakes have never been so high for the health and wellbeing of our nation, and our future is dependent on our ability to care for ourselves and our loved ones while keeping our families financially secure.

Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Debra Haaland
Member of Congress

Additional Co-signers:

Juan Vargas
Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Sheila Jackson Lee
Adriano Espaillat
Frederica S. Wilson
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Veronica Escobar

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