

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 23, 2021

President Biden & Vice President Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

We are writing to thank you for your clear commitment to working families, to the care economy and for the ways you have quickly demonstrated this commitment in your agenda for the first 100 days and your American Rescue Plan Proposal¹. Your administration has acknowledged how critical these policies are not just to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to building back better towards a just economy that leaves no worker, no family and no community behind. As your Administration works to craft the next recovery package, we strongly urge you to include meaningful and permanent paid leave in that package, to prioritize it in your legislative agendas, and to partner with us to finally make this a reality in America.

In March of last year, Congress quickly passed an emergency paid sick and childcare leave program, acknowledging how important these benefits would be to helping workers and families survive the public health, economic and caregiving crises. Even though the Trump Administration failed to broadly implement the program, it prevented more than 15,000 COVID-19 cases per day². It helped workers and families on the brink hold onto their jobs, care for their families, safely quarantine, and recover from a deadly virus. It helped small businesses stay afloat. However, as many as 106 million workers were not included in that, predominantly women, low-wage and essential workers of color, the workers already least likely to have paid leave through their employers³. These were also the workers who continue to carry our nation through this pandemic even while facing greater risks and having less protections; the frontline workers who keep us fed, keep us working, keep us safe, and keep us healthy. They should have already had paid leave.

That emergency paid leave policy has since expired, and while you prioritized its reinstatement in the American Rescue Plan, at this point it appears that it will likely only carry on as voluntary tax credits for businesses who choose to provide it, while what workers need is real and meaningful access to paid leave. There are paths to passing these protections permanently and working families in America need it now. We cannot emerge from this pandemic and remain one of only two countries in the world with no form of national paid leave. We need a policy that is inclusive and that protects all workers regardless of where they work, where they live, or whom they love. This moment, and the working families of America, demand and deserve real and lasting policy change and protection.

Paid leave is an issue of public health, economic recovery, and racial, gender, and economic justice. Black and Latinx women in particular are disproportionately those who make up both frontline workers and breadwinning mothers in their households⁴, and they are the least able to afford losing their income to care for themselves or a sick family member. Many of the top jobs in which women and women of color work, from health care to child care, have been deemed essential, forcing them to choose between a paycheck and their health, as well as the health of their families, neighbors, coworkers, and customers.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation/2021/01/20/president-biden-announces-american-rescue-plan/>

² <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00863>

³ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2020/04/17/483287/coronavirus-paid-leave-exemptions-exclude-millions-workers-coverage/>

⁴ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/04/23/483846/frontlines-work-home/>

We call on the Administration and Congressional leadership to make essential work more than a title, but to give essential workers the dignity, respect, and protections they should have had well before a pandemic.

Even workers with the ability to work from home are facing unprecedented challenges between caring for children with remote learning or for ill loved ones without support, all while doing paid work at the same time. This has forced millions to lose that pay and their jobs in a time of great instability, and has resulted in women losing a net 5.3 million jobs, and 2.3 million women leaving the workforce⁵.

To be clear, this was a policy failure long before COVID-19 hit; every one of us will need to give and receive care in our lifetimes, in times of crisis and beyond. Families lose \$22.5 billion a year in this country because of the lack of access to paid leave, with ripple effects throughout the economy. In one of the wealthiest countries in the world, no worker should be forced to choose between keeping their family safe and paying the rent. No one should have to make the impossible choice between their life and their livelihood. But in America, workers and families are forced to do this every single day. Passing and ensuring access to meaningful paid leave is the way to deliver both rescue and recovery. This is the way to bring us together. This is the way we can truly build back better. The cost of our inaction is simply too high.

We urge you to include and prioritize paid leave in your recovery plans and to work with Congress to finally and quickly pass paid leave for all—for good.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Rosa DeLauro
Member of Congress

Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

Colin Allred
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenuaer
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress

Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

⁵ <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/January-Jobs-Day-FS.pdf>

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress

Cori Bush
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
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David N. Cicilline
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Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
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Emanuel Cleaver, II
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Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa
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Jason Crow
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Danny K. Davis
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Madeleine Dean
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Mark DeSaulnier
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Ted Deutch
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Debbie Dingell
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Anna G. Eshoo
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Adriano Espaillat
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Dwight Evans
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Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Lois Frankel
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Ruben Gallego
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Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Al Green
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Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress

Kaialii Kahele
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
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Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

James R. Langevin
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John B. Larson
Member of Congress

Brenda Lawrence
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Al Lawson
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
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Doris Matsui
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Betty McCollum
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James P. McGovern
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Gwen Moore
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Jerrold Nadler
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Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Ilhan Omar
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Frank Pallone, Jr.
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Donald M. Payne, Jr.
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Chellie Pingree
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Mary Gay Scanlon
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Adam Schiff
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Albio Sires
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Susan Wild
Member of Congress

Haley Stevens
Member of Congress

Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

cc:

Speaker Nancy Pelosi

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer

Leader Kevin McCarthy

Leader Mitch McConnell