

July 22, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer,

We, the undersigned organizations from the Black reproductive health, rights and justice community, are writing to request that the next COVID-19 relief package include robust and flexible funding for state and local assistance to address COVID-19 as well as significant funding to support fair and accessible elections across the country. As our country faces an unprecedented pandemic, economic recession, and reckons with its incredibly hostile history of racism and white supremacy, it is ever more important that we fortify our communities by investing both in its infrastructure and its democracy. **Accordingly, we request that, at a minimum, Congress provides \$915 billion in relief funding to states and localities for COVID-19 and separately \$3.6 billion for elections – as provided for in H.R. 6800, The HEROES Act.**

One of the core components of reproductive justice is the right to raise our families in safe environments with dignity and respect. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the impossible choices that Black women regularly face in many aspects of life that affect their ability to provide for and keep our chosen families safe. Black women are both more likely to be laid off and overrepresented in the frontline professions deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Studies](#) have shown that Black women are nearly twice as likely as white men to say that they have either been laid off, furloughed, or had their hours and/or pay reduced because of the pandemic. The current crises are only worsening existing disparities. According to [data](#) from the National Women’s Law Center, Black women’s share of the low-paid workforce is 1.5 times larger than their share of the overall workforce. The persistent wage gap is also evident: Black women are more than twice as likely as white men to say that they would not be able to afford necessities for more than a month if they lost their personal income. Choosing to work can be a death sentence, while choosing not to work can make living impossible. These difficult decisions

are exacerbated by the persistence of medical racism; Black women who contract the virus risk discrimination by medical practitioners if they seek testing or treatment and ultimately may not seek care at all to avoid negative experiences in health care settings.

Congress Must Provide Robust Funding to States and Localities and Must Not Restrict Use of the Funds

Congress must provide states and localities with funding to support their budgets and provide flexibility in the use of those funds to ensure that each state can provide for its residents, including preserving essential health care services for women and communities of color, particularly Black women who have been [disproportionately affected](#) by COVID-19 and who make up [9 percent](#) of state and local government workers. Without this funding, states and local governments will be forced to scale back and even eliminate vital programs, or lay off or furlough employees. The impact of such cuts would have devastating effects at a time when [more than 40 million people](#) have lost their jobs and [5.4 million Americans](#) have lost health insurance during the pandemic. Frontline workers themselves have [stressed the need](#) to maintain public services to support the economy, and the majority of Americans [agree](#) that failure to do so would jeopardize economic stability in their state. States received \$150 billion in the CARES Act, but the funds were not apportioned according to impact by the COVID-19 crisis.

States like California - a state that is usually a donor state by over \$13 billion per year - are depending on federal funds to close a budget shortfall due to the crisis. Between January and May of 2020, California's budget went from over a \$6 billion surplus to a [\\$54 billion deficit](#), prompting major cuts and a dip into the state's reserves. Without state funding, vital programs such as support for health care, courts, hospitals, environmental protections, housing assistance, child care and other services will have to be further cut this fall. For states in the South and Midwest, their future is much darker. For example, Ohio's economic tax revenue is down 9 percent with estimates of a \$2.4 billion deficit for the next fiscal year. The state has already frozen pay for many government employees and is requiring furlough days. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, most states have about a [10 percent shortfall](#) for this fiscal year and will reach a 25 percent shortfall in 2021, which does not include projections of another reverse course or economic shutdown. A quarter lost in revenue can lead to deep cuts to health and human services programs, layoffs, and cuts in public services and in government contracts.

As such, the \$915 billion provided in the HEROES Act is the absolute minimum amount needed to help states and localities offset their shortfalls and is vital to both the health and livelihoods of many Americans as well as the economic wellness of states both large and small.

Congress Must Provide Robust Additional Funding to Support Fair and Safe Elections

Being able to participate in free and fair elections is a cornerstone to a Democratic Republic - as well as the ability to assert autonomy over oneself. The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional barriers for many communities to access the polls and will continue to do so without robust federal assistance. According to a [study](#) conducted by the Center for Election Innovation and Research, new voter registrations in 12 states and D.C. declined an alarming 70 percent in April, compared to January. Without additional funding, we run the risk of disenfranchising millions of voters across the country.

While the CARES Act provided \$400 million in election assistance, these funds will [not cover](#) the resources needed for the election in November. Congress must provide at least \$3.6 billion in election funding to prevent widespread voter suppression. For example, earlier this month, the Executive Director of the Kentucky State Board of Elections [testified](#) that 60 percent of CARES Act funds have already been spent on the primary election in Kentucky and that funds were running out, a concern that was echoed by other states. It has also been [reported](#) that states have had to turn to their election security funds in order to cover a range of unanticipated costs that stem from COVID-19. Some of these costs include finding bigger indoor polling spaces, moving polling places from schools and senior centers to safe locations, complying with CDC recommendations, public education to inform voters about the changes in procedures for voting, as well as preparing for a more robust mail-in ballot programs. And the majority of Americans support making our elections safer. A recent [poll](#) by the Brennan Center for Justice showed that four out of five Americans believe that all Americans should get a vote by mail ballot and two-thirds want to extend the number of election days.

As the country prepares for another presidential election, it is critical that we make sure that Black women have continued access and education needed to safely participate in local and national elections. Black women are consistently dependable voters: in 2018, 57 percent of eligible Black women [voted](#) in the election, the highest of any group. Ensuring their access to the ballot is particularly important given the disproportionate ways in which COVID-19 has impacted the Black community, which, without added safety protections, increases the risk of COVID-19 in vulnerable populations.

Black women and those who are most exposed to the harms of the COVID-19 public health and economic crises due to systemic racism and inequities cannot afford to lose access to critical services or to their right to vote. We ask that you consider the obligation of both the federal government, states, and localities to protect all of their constituents from the devastating impact of COVID-19 and the economic fallout that has resulted from the pandemic. Specifically, to reiterate, we request that the next COVID-19 relief package include robust and flexible funding

for state and local assistance to address COVID-19 as well as significant funding to support fair and accessible elections across the country.

Sincerely,

Angela D. Aina
Interim Executive Director
Black Mamas Matter Alliance

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President & CEO
New Voices for Reproductive Justice

Linda Blount, MHA
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Feminist Women's Health Center

Cherisse Scott
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SisterReach

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**In Our Own Voice National Black Women's
Reproductive Justice Agenda**

Monica Simpson
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Toni M. Bond, PhD
**One of the founders of the Reproductive
Justice Framework**