



May 28, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: The Senate Must Swiftly Pass the HEROES Act**

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

I write on behalf of UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza) to urge swift Senate passage of the HEROES Act (H.R. 6800). This action is needed to defend the American people from the ongoing health and economic threats of the COVID-19 pandemic. The delay in Senate action will strangle the state and local response to protect communities from COVID-19 and hurt millions of people who have lost jobs and health coverage, have missed rent and mortgage payments, and worry where their next meal will come from. I therefore urge you to take up and pass the HEROES Act immediately.

Any delay in emergency aid will be particularly devastating to the health and well-being of our nation's 58 million Latinos, far too many of whom have been left out of the four coronavirus relief packages enacted so far. To date, the HEROES Act passed by the House of Representatives on May 15 is the only legislative proposal considered in Congress that would more equitably extend emergency relief to Latinos, including immigrants and mixed-status families. Failure to respond urgently to the human suffering we are witnessing is deeply objectionable and, from a public health and economic perspective, wholly indefensible.

Data collected from every corner of our country reveals the multiple ways in which Latinos are putting life and limb on the line to help our nation through this crisis and continue to be disproportionately impacted by the health and economic hazards of the pandemic.

Latinos are overrepresented in "essential" occupations where they are most at risk of exposure to coronavirus infection. These jobs include those along the American food supply chain, in health care and personal care settings, and in the service industry, such as cashiers, drivers, and janitors. Given that Latinos in such jobs do not have the luxury of telework or self-isolation during the COVID-19 crisis, we are witnessing grim health outcomes: Latinos comprise 18.3% of the total U.S. population, yet based on recent CDC data, they make up nearly 30% of those diagnosed with COVID-19 and 26.9% of all U.S. COVID-19 deaths. Tragically, the data also show that 45% of all confirmed cases among children are Latino.

Latinos are also bearing the brunt of the economic fallout from the pandemic. Depression-era unemployment levels are taking their toll on the newly unemployed, and Latinos are disproportionately represented among them. The April jobs report revealed the highest Latino unemployment rate on record—18.9%—which is substantially higher than the troubling national unemployment rate of 14.7%. A recent [national poll](#) by SOMOS Health Care, MoveOn, and UnidosUS also confirmed the dire economic circumstances of Latinos: 36% of respondents said that they or someone in their household had experienced losing a job; 68% fear not being able to keep up with basic expenses; and 50% of households report having difficulty buying or finding necessities such as food, household supplies, or medicine.

While Latinos are on the frontlines risking COVID-19 exposure and powering America's defense against the pandemic and economic downturn, millions of them have been excluded from emergency relief passed by Congress. Our poll revealed that Latinos strongly agree that the stimulus enacted so far was not enough to get them and their families through the next few months and that they overwhelmingly support HEROES Act provisions that would extend relief to Latinos and immigrants who have been left out of prior legislative packages.

While the HEROES Act does not fully meet the urgent COVID-19-related needs of Latinos and their families, it represents significant progress in reducing the disproportionate impact they are facing in this unprecedented crisis. UnidosUS strongly supports the following provisions in the bill that are urgently needed to prevent illness, death, hunger, homelessness, and economic devastation in the Latino community. If enacted, the bill would:

- **Protect public health** by expanding free access to COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines, regardless of immigration status, and makes additional critical investments in care for the uninsured, along with opening a special enrollment period in the ACA exchanges. The bill also increases the Medicaid program's federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) to states and supports Americans who lose their employer-provided health insurance.
- **Bolster our economic security** by providing additional cash payments to individuals and increased payments for dependents up to the age of 24. The payments are also extended, including retroactively, to ITIN holders and mixed-status families, correcting a devastating flaw in the CARES Act that left out some taxpaying families. The bill honors all essential workers who have risked their lives during the pandemic, including health care workers and farmworkers critical to our food supply, by providing them premium "hazard" pay.
- **Support the unemployed** by extending expanded unemployment benefits through January 31, 2021, to ensure access to basic economic support until it is safe for workers to return to their jobs.
- **Keep Americans in their homes** with \$175 billion in new supports to assist renters and homeowners make monthly rent, mortgage and utility payments, and other housing-related costs and \$100 million to fund HUD's housing counseling program, which provides critical support to consumers facing foreclosure and eviction.
- **Feed people who are hungry** by increasing the maximum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit by 15%, nearly doubling the minimum SNAP benefit

to \$30 per month and making critical investments in child nutrition, school meal replacement, food banks, and nutrition programs for the elderly.

- **Save minority-owned small businesses at the brink of closure** by creating a set-aside of funds within the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) specifically for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), Minority Development Institutions (MDIs), SBA microlenders, and SBA Certified Development Companies (CDCs). It also carves out funds specifically for small businesses with 10 or fewer employees and nonprofits of all sizes to ensure that they are fully able to access PPP funds.
- **Empower and protect our students and teachers** by providing emergency funding to support K–12 education and state and local governments, which will prevent teacher layoffs and cuts to public education. The suspension of student loan payments under the CARES Act would be extended from September 30, 2020 to September 30, 2021, and up to \$10,000 in debt relief would be provided to federal student loan borrowers with the greatest need. The bill would also amend the eligibility for higher education emergency relief grants under the CARES Act to include college students regardless of immigration status.
- **Stabilize our workforce** by providing work permits (“deferred action”) for undocumented workers in essential critical infrastructure, including health care, public safety, and agriculture.

Together, this aid will make a significant difference for Latinos, others in need, and our nation. The pandemic has made it clear: our health and economic well-being are interconnected, and the health care and economic relief passed by Congress must include all Latinos and immigrants to give us the greatest chance of putting this crisis behind us. UnidosUS therefore urges the Senate to immediately consider and pass the HEROES Act with the above-mentioned provisions intact. Anything less would be a moral tragedy and counterproductive to our shared, interdependent goals of defeating the pandemic, stabilizing our economy, and powering an equitable and sustainable recovery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguía". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Murguía  
President and CEO  
UnidosUS