

July 31, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza), I write to share my strong opposition to the so-called “HEALS Act” and disappointment with the introduction of yet another proposal from Senate leadership that ignores the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on the Latino community and other communities of color. Since the start of the pandemic, UnidosUS—the nation’s largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization—has been crystal clear: to defeat this virus, our health care system must provide inclusive care to everyone, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, and immigration status. Only by defeating the virus can we protect the welfare of America’s families and put our nation on a stable path to recovery. The “HEALS Act” sends the message that protecting businesses from liability is more important than saving lives, and that Senate leaders believe they have a responsibility to protect their own interests and people who look like them but no responsibility to provide for the welfare of Latinos, immigrants, or their children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), UnidosUS’s comprehensive [report](#) titled *The Latino Community in the Time of Coronavirus: The Case for a Broad and Inclusive Government Response*, and study after study confirm what we all see with our own eyes: Latinos and other communities of color are underrepresented among those with health coverage and overrepresented among the sick and dying. This is a result of long-standing racism and disparities in our health care system and the fact that Latinos disproportionately fill essential jobs, which increases their exposure to the virus. That is why, despite making up 18% of the U.S. population, according to [the CDC](#) Latinos represent 32% of COVID-19 cases. To ignore this is dangerous and will result in more people getting sick and more people dying.

To prevent this, the next response package must extend coverage for COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines to all, regardless of insurance, ability to pay or immigration status. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, millions of people, including Latinos, essential workers, immigrants, and other low-income people, were uninsured or underinsured. Millions more have joined them, due to losing their jobs and with it, employer-sponsored health insurance. To allow families to be ravaged by the virus with no means to access life-saving treatment and care would be a moral and public health catastrophe and an absolute nonstarter for UnidosUS.

A robust and inclusive health care response to the virus is our foremost priority, but the economic supports in the next relief package must also reach all families. According to the U.S. [Census Bureau](#), 65% of Latino households have reported experiencing the loss of employment income since the start of the pandemic, compared to 46% of White households. If we discriminate in our safety-net response, as the “HEALS Act” does, and leave millions of families facing long-term unemployment, hunger, eviction, and threats to their livelihood with no support, this will cause long-term harm to Latinos and needlessly hobble our economic recovery.

- Children and families will go hungry without a significant boost in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or an expansion of SNAP eligibility to cover more Latinos and immigrants.
- The CARES Act family penalty has barred [at least 5.5 million](#) U.S. citizens and green card-holding spouses and children from receiving economic impact payments and left them with no means to meet their basic needs. This penalty must be eliminated retroactively and in the next recovery package.
- Now is not the time to cut or complicate unemployment insurance benefits, including the pandemic benefit. Jobless Americans, many of whom cannot return to work because it is not yet safe or their jobs have disappeared, cannot afford to have the federal government withhold support and experiment with their livelihoods.
- To prevent housing insecurity and a spike in homelessness, the CARES Act eviction moratorium must be extended, and renters and homeowners need emergency rental assistance, foreclosure prevention support, and ready access to housing counseling.
- The nation’s 5 million English learners (ELs) in U.S. public schools will continue to fall further behind their peers without an investment in Title III, the federal funding stream dedicated to advancing the education of ELs. The Title III set-aside funding that is included in S. 4112, the “Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act,” must be incorporated in K–12 funding to prevent further widening of the achievement gap experienced by racial and ethnic minorities.
- Student borrowers cannot be left to face a future undermined by mountains of debt. A half-hearted simplification of the federal student loan repayment system is a paltry and ineffective alternative to real student debt cancellation.
- Repeatedly threatening the status and work authorization of DACA and TPS holders undermines the stability of our workforce and hurts our economy. To ensure the valuable contributions of these and other workers—many of whom work on the front lines of the pandemic—we must automatically extend their work permits.

- We cannot misuse limited COVID-19 emergency funding for immigration enforcement agencies. With border apprehensions and encounters at ports of entry at record lows, extending limited COVID-19 relief dollars to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is wholly irresponsible.
- The across-the-board 10% fee surcharge to be imposed on immigration benefits applicants will close off legal pathways for many seeking to reunite with family and for those eager to complete their immigrant integration journey by becoming U.S. citizens. Long before the pandemic, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) set plans in action to significantly increase fees and limit access to application fee waivers. A solution to USCIS's budget troubles cannot result in a discriminatory immigration system accessible only to the wealthy.

We also object that the "HEALS Act" extends liability immunity, tax credits, and business meal tax deductions to employers; provides billions of dollars to replenish military coffers raided by the administration to fund border wall construction; and commits \$1.75 billion for a new FBI headquarters in Washington, DC. To put these commitments before those that would provide real health and economic relief is wholly irresponsible and flies in the face of the calls for a national reckoning on centuries of racial injustice.

It has been more than two months since the House of Representatives passed the "HEROES Act," an inclusive and comprehensive bill that we support because it would meet the dire needs of Latinos and other communities of color who have thus far been excluded. Within that time frame, the Senate has dragged its feet as the United States has experienced approximately three million new COVID-19 infections and lost an additional 65,000 lives. We are out of time and out of patience. All Americans want to see Congress working swiftly in a bipartisan manner to stop the spread of the virus. We also want a plan that takes seriously the disproportionate infection rates and deaths among the nation's Latinos. You have an opportunity to show that you are taking responsibility for and care about all members of our society suffering through this pandemic. We urge you to rise to the occasion.

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