



CREATING GOOD JOBS, A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT, AND A FAIR AND THRIVING ECONOMY

August 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

As a coalition of some of the nation's largest labor unions and environmental organizations, collectively representing millions of members and supporters, the BlueGreen Alliance urges you to reject harmful provisions in the HEALS Act and instead move swiftly to advance critical relief for the COVID-19 crisis that prioritizes workers, families, and communities most in need.

Urgent relief is needed— America has surpassed 4 million cases and 150,000 deaths due to the coronavirus. The ten-week total for unemployment claims has surpassed 40 million. And months into this pandemic, workers continue to struggle to stay safe and healthy on the job, particularly as states begin to reopen parts of the economy and state and local government budgets are ravaged. We must ensure the safety of workers on the job in the face of COVID-19, whether they are healthcare workers providing critical care, workers in warehouses or grocery stores, utility workers ensuring critical infrastructure is functioning, or manufacturing workers producing essential products. And we must prioritize the most vulnerable; safeguard working peoples' jobs, homes, and livelihoods; and shore up essential public services.

The HEALS Act put forward by Senate Republicans fails to meet this challenge and urgent needs of workers and families. It fails to include numerous key provisions that were included in the House-passed HEROES Act (H.R. 6800) to address the threats and challenges that working people on the frontlines continue to face.

We urge Congress to reject the harmful provisions put forth in HEALS and instead move forward a robust package that:

1. Protects the health and safety of healthcare, emergency, critical infrastructure, manufacturing, and all essential workers:

- Reject HEALS Act provisions to shield corporations from liability if their workers get sick on the job while offering no DOL protections to ensure worker safety;
- Require the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue, enforce, and train employers and workers in the provisions of an emergency temporary standard to protect all frontline workers from COVID-19 (H.R. 6559, S. 3677 COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act of 2020)
- Require the Mine Safety and Health Administration to issue, enforce, and train employers and workers in the provisions of an emergency standard to protect miners from COVID-19 (S. 3710, COVID-19 Mine Worker Protection Act);
- Ensure all workers who provide direct patient care, emergency services, utility and manufacturing workers, or are otherwise in hazardous working environments are compensated with appropriate pay.

2. Ensures the manufacture and supply of critical equipment immediately and secure the U.S. supply chain, jobs, and workers to meet ongoing need:

- Ensure the federal government fully utilizes the Defense Production Act (DPA), to manufacture and distribute the equipment, supplies, and employ the procedures necessary to protect the public and all essential workers, including passing the Medical Supply Chain Emergency Act to ensure sufficient immediate supply, as well as ensuring requisite funding for the implementation of DPA;
- Require the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at HHS to do an annual assessment and to replenish masks, medicine, and medical equipment in the Strategic National Stockpile, in line with ongoing review of domestic supply chain and stockpile needs for critical goods.

3. Protects communities and workers' jobs, wages, and benefits:

- Extend unemployment insurance (UI) benefit eligibility for the duration of the COVID-19-caused economic downturn and expand UI work-sharing eligibility to avoid layoffs;
- Ensure workers, including contract workers, in all sectors—and at companies of all sizes—have access to paid sick leave for themselves and family members—closing the loophole from CARES to cover companies with over 500 employees;
- Ensure a workers' leave for COVID-19 is separate from their existing leave and that they are eligible at any time they are employed;
- Protect workers' healthcare and pension plans and coverage of missed contributions due to missed work or layoffs;
- Ensure any taxpayer is eligible to receive stimulus benefits;

- Guarantee retirement security through a federally-funded cash infusion to shore up multi-employer pension plans, using the House-passed Butch-Lewis Act and/or direct fiscal aid to plans; and
- Protect workers and their benefits in bankruptcy proceedings, including the Protecting Employees and Retirees in Business Bankruptcies Act of 2018 (S. 2518, 115th Congress).

4. Ensures critical services for community health and safety and support for education:

- Provide at least \$1 trillion in direct additional, unrestricted, funding to state and local governments facing severe budget shortfalls;
- Provide at least \$200 billion in additional emergency relief grant funding for K-12, reject HEALS Act conditions tied to schools re-opening, and:
 - i. Require response plans for students with special needs, those in special facilities, as well as those who do not speak English as their first language;
 - ii. Ensure protections are in place for custodial staff tasked with decontaminating facilities impacted by COVID-19;
 - iii. Compensate educational professionals working additional hours to ensure children and parents are prepared and safe;
- Provide at least \$4 billion in state funding to ensure safe and secure elections in 2020;
- Provide at least \$5 billion for the “Ready Reserve Corps” to respond to public health emergencies and build community resilience; and
- Issue a moratorium on all evictions, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs, and create a grant program to assist low-income households with utility costs

At the same time, we must start thinking long-term about how we provide ongoing security for American workers and families and put America back to work. Millions of people are already out of work and projections suggest that even if we start to recover, the unemployment rate will still be around 9.3% by the end of the year. At the same time, this crisis has demonstrated that our economy already wasn’t working for too many Americans. We went into this pandemic with three ongoing interconnected crises: economic inequality, racial inequality, and climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a harsh spotlight on just how severe and disproportionate the impacts of these crises are. People of color are more economically vulnerable in this crisis, and disproportionately their lives are being put at greater risk: Black Americans represent 22.4% of COVID-19 deaths while making up just 12.5% of the U.S. population and among those aged 45-54, Black and Hispanic/Latino death rates are at least six times higher than for whites.

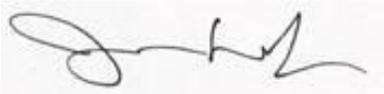
As we make investments to get the economy back on track, everything we do must be aimed at building a stronger, fairer, and cleaner economy that creates and sustains the good, high-paying

jobs of the future and makes our communities and workers more resilient to crises. This should include investing at scale in infrastructure and clean manufacturing, rebuilding the public sector and services to prepare for and respond to crises, providing critical long-term support and protections to workers, and prioritizing equitable rebuilding and investments in those workers and communities that need it most, especially low-income communities, communities of color, and deindustrialized communities.

We urge you to pass a COVID-19 relief and recovery package that shows up in the pockets of those who need it; promotes climate stability; creates quality, family-sustaining jobs; and lays a foundation for more equitable and low-carbon American prosperity for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Walsh", is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

Jason Walsh
Executive Director
BlueGreen Alliance