

INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

JAMES P. HOFFA
General President

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March 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

On behalf of the 1.4 million hardworking men and women of the Teamsters Union, I urge you to include robust and comprehensive relief and supports for Teamster members and their families in the stimulus package currently being negotiated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in anticipated future relief legislation. We often say that the Teamsters Union represents workers from A to Z – that is, airline workers to zookeepers. Our diversity is a source of great pride and strength, but it also means that Teamster members are being broadly impacted by all facets of this crisis.

Many of the Teamsters Union's 22 divisions are experiencing especially severe economic harm from the recent outbreak. Teamster employers in and connected to the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries have been especially hard hit by lack of consumer demand and mandated property closures associated with social distancing guidelines. This includes, but is most certainly not limited to Teamsters working in the airline, car rental and gaming/ casino industries. Teamster members working directly for and in association with education, including school bus drivers, are similarly impacted by ongoing school closures.

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Hard hit industries need economic relief, but any federal aid must protect labor rights and come with statutory guarantees that the money will go to the frontline workforce, including contract workers, to mitigate the need for layoffs and ensure access to critical benefits like guaranteed paid sick and family leave. No employer recipient of COVID-19 recovery federal aid should be permitted to engage in stock buybacks with any of the economic aid. Further, collective bargaining agreements must be protected. Employers receiving Federal support must not be permitted to discharge collective bargaining agreements and impose harsh concessions that could last well beyond the duration of this crisis. Federal bankruptcy code must be strengthened broadly to also prevent such outcomes.

In other Teamster divisions, we have members who are working long hours, making sure that American families have groceries and other household essentials. Teamsters in health care and working in all aspects of public service, including waste management are on the front lines of this crisis. Now more than ever, we are so proud to say that Teamster members are “keeping America moving,” but these Teamsters must be appropriately protected. Congress and the Administration must provide funding and guidelines for training workers in all impacted industries on the hazards of the coronavirus and workers’ role in keeping themselves and the public safe from contamination. Congress and the Administration must also provide appropriate personal protective equipment, and require employers to formulate plans to minimize exposure and risk.

Displaced workers need quick, reliable access to unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance must be universally available, covering workers who have not traditionally had access to these benefits including independent contractors. We applaud key provisions of the Families First Corona Virus Response Act (H.R. 6201) which allows states to relax requirements imposed on a typical unemployment claim, such as requirements that beneficiaries seek work, quit only for good cause and the 7 day wait requirement. However, an extension of these same benefits to railroaders operating under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Program was not included in H.R. 6201. That will need to be fixed swiftly in future legislation.

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Reliable access to unemployment insurance is critical, but not the whole of what is needed to maintain economic stability for working families, the Federal government must provide protections against foreclosures, evictions, credit defaults, and other liens for workers who may be laid off or have reduced hours.

Working families also need access to comprehensive paid sick and family leave. While we appreciate the expanded paid coverage provided for in H.R. 6201, the limitation to only those employers with less than 500 employees and exemption for certain small businesses is deeply problematic and overlooks a large swath of Teamster employers and members. This must be rectified in future stimulus efforts.

Displaced workers also need immediate, reliable and continued access to comprehensive health insurance. Employers should be required to extend health coverage during layoffs past current contractual provisions by paying COBRA premiums to health plans during the layoff. For workers who have no current health coverage, the federal government should provide full coverage in applicable federal health programs until the laid off workers are re-employed.

Running in tandem with all of these concerns is our longstanding priority to protect pensions and find a solution for the multiemployer pension funding crisis. The Coronavirus has the potential to wreak havoc on multiemployer pension plans that are already in critical and declining status. Critical plans, endangered plans and single employer plans are threatened just as significantly. Employee layoffs and furloughs will adversely affect contributions to these plans thereby putting these plans on an even faster path to insolvency and further jeopardizing the benefits that retirees, and active workers, have earned. Failure to address this situation could also accelerate the timeline regarding PBGC insolvency. Any economic stimulus/stabilization package must address the issue of critical and declining multiemployer pension plans and protect the earned pension benefits of retirees and workers.

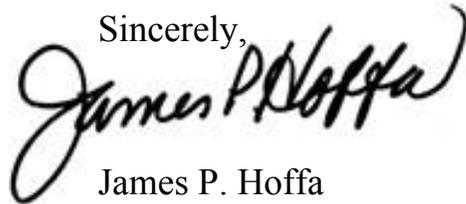
We thank you for the legislation that has already been passed which begins to address the harm that the coronavirus pandemic has caused, but so much more needs to be done. As you move forward with additional stimulus efforts, we urge you to place working families and their needs at the center of the Federal government's response. Most importantly we urge you to respond to this crisis with

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kindness and empathy. The challenge presented to us as a country is unprecedented, but we are all in it together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James P. Hoffa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and a distinct "H".

James P. Hoffa
General President