

March 17, 2020

Dear Governor Whitmer,

As the leaders of community organizations across the state, we believe it is our responsibility to redeploy our efforts in support of the collective effort to keep our communities safe and healthy. We commend the many public officials, especially our Governor, for the steps you have taken thus far to respond to this crisis. We are writing today to ask for your full commitment to a **just COVID-19 response**.

With dozens of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Michigan, we are all waiting anxiously to see whether our loved ones will fall ill, and whether our families will be able to continue meeting basic needs for childcare, rent, groceries, and utilities while adhering to public health best practices, caring for sick family members, and ultimately moving beyond the COVID-19 outbreak intact.

However, research and our own lived experiences tell us that crises will not fall on all of us equally; instead, this crisis will exacerbate, and be exacerbated by, existing social fault lines and inequality. From the thousands with disconnected water accounts and no clear timeline for reconnection, to millions of service industry workers with no paid sick leave, COVID-19 is exposing chronic problems that must be addressed now more than ever. Deciding whether to stay home or go to work with a fever to afford groceries; whether to go to the emergency room or go without treatment because you fear the cost of going uninsured or undocumented— these are decisions no one should have to make. And, frankly, they are decisions that we cannot afford for people to make if we are going to get through this crisis successfully.

Governor Whitmer, we're asking you to take even more aggressive action, using your executive authority and public platform to protect our community with a **just COVID-19 response**.

1. **Ensure access to healthcare.** In order to contain the virus and to affirm basic human rights we believe that all people, regardless of citizenship status, insurance status or ability to pay deserve access to quality healthcare including testing, treatment, and a vaccine when available.
2. **Protect workers and small business.** The strength of our economy during these times depends on our ability to prioritize workers over banks and billionaire stockholders. Workers and small businesses should not suffer because of this pandemic and steps, from paid sick leave to COVID training, must be taken to protect us all.
3. **Keep people in their homes.** Weathering this storm requires keeping people in their homes, not pushing them out.
4. **Guarantee access to human rights: water, food, and utilities.** Water is fundamentally a human right and our first line of defense against COVID-19.
5. **Maintain access to quality education and protect parents.** With schools and universities closed for weeks, we can reduce the heavy burden placed on parents, teachers, and students, and address existing inequities that are at risk of being exacerbated.
6. **Preserve our democracy.** We must ensure access to factual information for all communities, safeguard democratic norms, and implement sound emergency response protocols.
7. **Protect immigrant communities.** We are a nation of immigrants. Scapegoating and turning against each other will only worsen this pandemic.

8. **Protect vulnerable populations.** Seniors, incarcerated individuals, and those with disabilities are especially vulnerable right now. We must take steps to ensure their safety and security.
9. **Pandemics are a climate issue, take action now on the climate crisis,** which threatens the wellbeing of Michiganders. Protect Environmental Justice communities from high risk industrial facilities with appropriate safeguards during the pandemic.

As Michiganders, we must affirm these values. As our Governor, we're asking you to publicly commit to this platform and to the immediate actionable steps laid out in the attached document and also available at <https://micovidcommunity.com/policy-demands>.

Now more than ever, this virus has shown us that we are dependent on each other and whether we're Black or white, Latino or Asian, native or newcomer, we know it's time to pull together to demand the testing, treatment and time off we all need to get or stay well. Only by standing united can we ensure our own wellbeing through this outbreak and rewrite the rules to ensure better health for us all for time to come.

We, the undersigned organizations, ask you to commit to a **just response to the COVID-19 crisis**.

cc: [A copy of this letter was also sent to members of the State Legislature]

Allied Media Projects
Beebe Arts LLC
Black Lives Matter Michigan/Liberation PAC
Black the Vote
Brick and Mortar Collective
Center for Change
Congress of Communities
Consulting by Anée
Day House Catholic Worker
Detroit Action
Detroit Community Wealth Fund
Detroit Disability Power
Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation
Detroit Jews for Justice
Detroit Justice Center
Detroit People's Platform
East Michigan Environmental Action Council
Ecology Center
Flint Rising
482Forward
Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)
Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice (MECAWI)
Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition
Michigan Faith in Action
Michigan Liberation
Michigan Student Power Network

Michigan Voices
MIStudentsDream
Mothering Justice
Moratorium NOW!
Oakland Forward
Port Huron Food Not Bombs
Restaurant Opportunities Center or Michigan
Rising Voices of Asian American Families
SEIU Healthcare Michigan
Sierra Club Michigan Chapter
State Michigan APRI
Student Advocacy Center
Sunrise Movement Detroit
Totago LLC
Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights
We the People - Michigan
We Want Green Too
Yemeni American PAC Public Affairs Council - Hamtramck & Detroit
YDSA at Eastern Michigan University
(For an up to date list of individual and organizational signatories, visit
<https://micovidcommunity.com/>)

Policy Agenda for a Just COVID-19 Response

Healthcare

- Eliminate Medicaid work requirements.
- Require insurance companies to waive all copayments for coronavirus related treatments.
- Establish free quarantine facilities to minimize the spread of the virus.
- Provide free testing and COVID-19 related medical care to uninsured and undocumented people.

Work, Income, & Small Business

- Require all employers to offer paid sick leave.
- Guarantee a basic income for all.
 - Offer immediate unemployment benefits to impacted workers, i.e., those whose places of employment are shut down (such as college campuses, stadiums), those whose type of employment is adversely affected by social distancing, e.g., restaurants, gig economy workers, etc., and those who must stay home to care for children who are out of school.
- Offer training and testing to essential workers.
 - Provide all employees -- public and private sector -- who have contact with the public at airports, schools, hospitals, public transit systems, and elsewhere with training, testing, and equipment to keep themselves and us safe.
- Support small business with grants, technology, and training.
 - Local businesses have to be supported to do the right thing: allowing employees to work remotely, offering paid sick and family leave, canceling events or even closing for public safety, and moving their business and sales models online (like curbside pick-up for local grocers).

Housing

- Moratorium on evictions and foreclosures.
- Increase shelter access.
 - In collaboration with public health experts, redesign and increase emergency shelters to promote social distancing, consistent hygiene, regular testing, and medical care.

Water, Food, & Utilities

- Restore water to all disconnected households, and prohibit further shutoffs.
- Provide free high speed internet to every low-income household.
- Keep life-saving utilities on.
 - Direct utility providers to keep on electricity, natural gas and other energy sources as life-saving measures in self-quarantined situations;
 - Provide low-income based utility payment plans during and after the COVID-19 public health crisis, and provide affordable options for service continuation; and,
 - Subsidize gas, propane, wood, and kerosene for homes without municipal services during and after the pandemic.
- Provide resources and training to public transportation agencies to regularly disinfect surfaces.

Education & Childcare

- Provide all K-16 students free internet and technology to participate in on-line instruction.
- Provide child care vouchers for families, without income or citizenship requirements.
- Suspend K12 state testing requirements that affect school or teacher evaluation (MStep, PSAT, etc.).
- Continue offering meals and in-school health clinics to students.

Democracy & Information

- Extend the Census deadline.
- Expand online and absentee voting for elections and ballot petition signature collection.
- Communicate with all populations in mind.
 - Provide public information in multiple languages (including Spanish, Bangla, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Hmong, Vietnamese, Hindi, Japanese, Tagalog, Burmese, as well as in plain, simple English) and multiple modes (daily radio and TV addresses through legacy and ethnic media sources, social media, text system, email alerts, robocalls and mailings);
 - Produce videos in American Sign Language explaining public health updates and safety precautions; and,
 - Communicate all emergency alerts and official efforts clearly, in large-print and in multiple formats and languages.
- Ensure the crisis is not exploited to avoid democratic process.
 - Delay approval of environmental permit decisions by EGLE, particularly those requiring public hearings

Immigration

- Sick people can't be afraid to seek help.
 - Suspend ICE raids and detentions.
 - Keep ICE and Border Patrol out of hospitals.
 - Defend sanctuary city policies.
 - Halt pending deportations.
- Release all elderly and immune-compromised people from detention centers.
- Take immediate steps to ensure the health and safety of all those remaining in detention.
- End in-person ICE check ins; move immigration court hearings to a virtual space.

Vulnerable Populations

- Reduce jail populations.
 - There are thousands of individuals in jails who are at heightened risk because of their close quarters and lack of access to healthcare and cleaning supplies. We need immediate steps to reduce jail populations.
 - End cash bail.
 - Administratively grant personal recognizance bonds to everyone currently in jail on money bail.
 - Provide access to testing and high-quality, free healthcare to mitigate the risks of COVID-19's spread.
 - Make phone calls and video visitation free of charge immediately.

- Discourage law enforcement agencies from admitting non-violent offenders into jails.
- Provide respite care for caretakers of people with disabilities and the elderly.
- Allow extended drug prescriptions to minimize social contact for the sick.

Climate & Environment

- Protect against potential resulting environmental disasters.
 - Heighten communication between essential and high risk industrial facilities and EGLE / EPA / National Emergency Response regarding emergency response protocols related to COVID-19 and resulting potential worker shortages and facility malfunction.
- Start planning now.
 - Pandemic planning should be included in all emergency response and climate adaptation plans.
 - Create a Climate Justice Taskforce to discuss long-term planning for vulnerable communities for future pandemics.