

April 1, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20505

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20505

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20505

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20505

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

We write on behalf of our young people throughout the country with support from the 65 undersigned local, state, and national organizations. URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity is a multi-state reproductive justice organization that centers the leadership of young people in the South, Midwest, and most recently, California. In addition to federal policy, we have staff and members in our six states: Kansas, Ohio, Georgia, Alabama, Texas, and California. We are a dynamic group of young people working to change our communities through a reproductive justice framework. The term “reproductive justice” was coined by 12 Black women in 1994 after they recognized that the women’s rights movement, led largely by white women, could not account for the needs of women of color, other marginalized women, and trans and nonbinary people.¹

We believe that reproductive justice can only be achieved when all people have the economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about their bodies, sexuality, and reproduction for ourselves, our families, and our communities in all areas of life. We envision a liberated world where we can live with justice, love freely, express our gender and sexuality, and define and create families of our choosing. Unfortunately, we are not there yet.

As the situation surrounding COVID-19 continues to progress and as we receive ever-changing information, we know that the current systems are and have been failing our communities. While we are grateful for swift response from federal, state, and local officials, our communities need much more to be healthy and whole.

Marginalized communities — especially Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian/Asian American and Pacific Islanders, and other people of color, queer, trans and nonbinary folks, people with disabilities, and young people — have continued to exist in a world with systems that

¹ SisterSong. What is reproductive justice? <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

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uphold white supremacy, xenophobia, and patriarchy. These systems fail to address the health care, educational, environmental, and economic needs of our communities. Because of this, when pandemics like COVID-19 occur, our communities are disproportionately harmed. Asian/Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, in particular, have been impacted by lack of resources, racism, and an unstable government infrastructure stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We, therefore, call for immediate action during the COVID-19 public health crisis to center and support the most marginalized and system-impacted in our country. We demand:

- ★ Financial and other support directly to students and other young people regardless of their dependency status;
- ★ Paid sick leave for all workers;
- ★ All abortion clinics or other reproductive health care facilities that provide abortion care be deemed essential and medically necessary;
- ★ Any closures or limitations of services provided at courts in states with parental notification or consent policies must provide an alternative for minors to access judicial bypass and abortion care;
- ★ A rent and mortgage freeze for all;
- ★ Moratoriums on evictions and utility suspensions;
- ★ Expansion of unemployment to include undocumented residents;
- ★ Moratoriums on ICE deportations;
- ★ Halt arrests for minor offenses;
- ★ Expand Meal on Wheels to include older persons who would not normally fall within the program's eligibility requirements;
- ★ Equitable and accessible COVID-19 testing (including language accessibility);
- ★ Free treatment for anyone diagnosed with COVID-19;
- ★ Local reporting hotlines free from the inclusion of law enforcement, including ICE;
- ★ Increased access to healthcare by extending eligibility of Medicaid and other state health programs;

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- ★ Expand government assistance to all those who are forced to refrain from working including but not limited to assistance such as SNAP, TANF, and WIC programs;
- ★ All “high-risk” people in custody and detention, including immigration detention, be released and that all people who might be exposed or test positive be treated at a hospital setting, not the infirmary or medical unit;
- ★ Aggressive public awareness and education surrounding COVID-19, including addressing and dispelling the racist and xenophobic assumptions and behaviors regarding COVID-19 such as racism towards Asian/Asian American and Pacific Islanders;
- ★ Address transportation assistance and accessible care for patients with disabilities;
- ★ Federal government must honor obligations to Indigenous communities by providing necessary medical personnel when and where needed and requested to combat this crisis;
- ★ Clear communication and understanding that immigration status should not and will not be a factor in whether someone is able to receive testing and treatment;
- ★ Any limitations on travel must contain exceptions for people accessing time-sensitive reproductive health care, including abortion, filling prescriptions for contraception, or pregnancy-related care;
- ★ ICE will not be present in or around any medical setting;
- ★ Suspend all probation, parole/pretrial meetings, court-ordered classes, fines and fees as well as in-person drug testing;
- ★ Suspend all student loan payments and interest accrual during this public health crisis;
- ★ Provide funding and other support to organizations supporting survivors of domestic, sexual, and intimate partner violence;
- ★ Allowing doulas and other individuals who provide birth support, to be excluded from hospital visitor restrictions and be present in-person with a pregnant person, if a pregnant person chooses;
- ★ Telehealth/telemedicine options be made available to all who need it, with a particular focus on marginalized communities;

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- ★ Provide funding and additional support to U.S. territories American Samoa, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Northern Mariana Islands;
- ★ Minimize barriers to the ballot box and ensure that all voters can participate in the democratic process by casting their vote in a fair and secure election; and
- ★ Provide funding support for independent clinics and abortion providers.

While these demands are not exhaustive, we hope they will offer initial support to the people who need it most. We know if the federal government enacted these demands, it will change the material conditions of communities often silenced and historically rendered invisible. As an organization dedicated to centering young people and our reproductive justice values, it is imperative that any current and future federal legislation, including any stimulus packages, meet the above demands and center young people, queer, trans, and nonbinary communities, people of color, and people with disabilities.

During this current health crisis, it is vital that communities who will be disproportionately harmed are centered in any efforts to address COVID-19. This includes people and communities who have historically been targeted and criminalized by law enforcement such as sex workers, people experiencing homelessness, and people living with HIV.

We encourage you to support young people and other communities by passing legislation that meets their needs. Our lives depend on it.

Thank you for your consideration,

URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

Access Reproductive Care (ARC)-Southeast
ACT for Women & Girls
Advocates for Youth
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
AMPLIFY GA
Athlete Ally
Black and Pink
Black Women's Health Imperative
Center for Advancing Innovative Policy
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Citizens for Choice
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights

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Equality North Carolina
Feminist Women's Health Center
Frontera Fund
Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network
Girls Inc. of Chattanooga
Healthy Teen Network
Hometown Action
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice Texas
Lilith Fund
Medical Students for Choice
Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH)
MoveOn
NASTAD
National Abortion Federation
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Jewish Women
National Equality Action Team
National Health Law Program
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
New Georgia Project
Nurses for Sexual and Reproductive Health
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Planned Parenthood Southeast
Positive Women's Network-USA
Pride at Work
Provide Inc.
Reframe Health and Justice
Reproductive Health Access Project
Sex Workers Outreach Project-Baltimore
SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change
SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
SPARK Reproductive Justice Now!, Inc.
Texas Equal Access (TEA) Fund

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Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT)

Transgender Law Center

True Colors United

United We Dream Network

We Testify

West Fund

Woodhull Freedom Foundation

WV FREE