





June 10, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom  
 Members of the Governor's Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery  
 Members of the California Legislature  
 State Capitol  
 Sacramento, CA 95814  
 By email

**RE: Recommendations for a Just COVID-19 Response & Recovery to Support Resilient Communities**

Dear Governor Newsom, Members of the Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery and Members of the Legislature:

Addressing the immediate impacts of COVID-19 is rightfully the main focus of our state's response, and we laud Governor Newsom for establishing a Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery to strategize short- and long-term solutions for economic recovery in California. The impacts and risks from COVID-19 are dramatically different depending on who you are and where you live – whether you have a good job, access to healthcare, stable housing, and paid sick leave. Working class communities of color including Latinx, Black, AAPI, and Indigenous communities are being hit hardest by COVID-19 and are feeling the impacts of the collapsing global economy, health system, and social safety net as a result of the pandemic. The simultaneous and ongoing threats from the climate crisis such as wildfires and extreme heat days will inevitably worsen these unequal health outcomes and economic conditions. The overlapping impacts of the pandemic alongside climate change necessitates a targeted response that prioritizes the needs of communities with the least resources to respond. In short, COVID-19 vulnerability is environmental vulnerability.

The 85 undersigned organizations representing environmental justice, natural resources, transportation, equity and energy sectors offer the following guiding principles and recommendations, and request that they are included to inform an equitable approach to any funding or regulatory proposals meant to address the fallout from COVID-19. The principles and recommendations outlined in this letter give California the best opportunity to

embrace systemic transformation and meaningfully address the needs and concerns of priority communities as we begin to recover from COVID-19 and simultaneously prepare for climate-related impacts.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- **Deliver Targeted Investments.** Investments must be targeted to priority communities and significantly address the needs of Californians who are most impacted by pollution, pandemic, and climate change, particularly in Latinx, Black, AAPI, and Indigenous communities.
- **Uplift Community-Driven Solutions.** Investments must facilitate and require community leadership, decision-making power, and robust community engagement.
- **Avoid Burdens.** In a COVID-19 world, investments must not harm priority communities who are already experiencing significant socioeconomic, environmental, and health burdens.
- **Deliver Comprehensive Approach.** To achieve transformation, investments must comprehensively deliver better public health outcomes, environmental benefits, and economic opportunities.
- **Ensure Capacity Building and Technical Assistance.** Investments must include funds for capacity building and technical assistance to support communities with the least resources and help ensure they have access to programs and funding opportunities.

In addition to the guiding principles above, we also strongly encourage policymakers to adopt the **“Five Principles for Just COVID-19 Relief and Stimulus”** backed by nearly 1,000 environmental, justice, labor, and movement organizations in our state’s response: (1) Health is the top priority, for all people, with no exceptions; (2) Provide economic relief directly to the people; (3) Rescue workers and communities, not corporate executives; (4) Make a down payment on a regenerative economy, while preventing future crises; and, (5) Protect our democratic process while protecting each other.<sup>1</sup>

### **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **I. MAKE EQUITY REAL IN COVID-19 RESPONSE EFFORTS**

- *Protect Civic Engagement and Public Accountability*
- *Ensure Data Availability and Accessibility to Target Protections*
- *Address Racial Disparities through Structural Interventions*

#### **II. STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS FOR A GREEN STIMULUS**

- *Pursue A Minimum \$10 Billion Economic Stimulus Bond Measure*
- *Invest Bond Funding in Programs that Deliver Meaningful Community Benefits*
- *Support Toxic Site Cleanup to Prevent Contamination*
- *Deploy Resources to Electrify All Buildings and Transportation*
- *Invest in Clean and Affordable Transportation*
- *Oppose Regulatory Rollbacks and Delays That Weaken Protections*

#### **III. ACHIEVING ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY**

- *Invest In Resilient Workforce Development and Training*
- *Support Small, Locally-Based Businesses*
- *Provide Economic Relief through Housing and Utilities Assistance*
- *Expand Access to Free Telehealth Services*
- *Bridge the Digital Divide*

### **DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS**

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<sup>1</sup> The People’s Bailout Five Principles for Just COVID-19 Relief and Stimulus. <https://thepeoplesbailout.org/>

## I. MAKE EQUITY REAL IN COVID-19 RESPONSE EFFORTS

Now more than ever we must practice racial equity and turn our commitment into actionable strategies in our immediate response to the crisis, in our recovery efforts, and as the world reshapes the global economy. We have to make equity “real” by embedding equity in a program’s (1) goals, vision, values, (2) processes, (3) implementation to create equitable outcomes, and (4) analysis to measure equity progress. The following recommendations offer guidance on how to transform the systems that disproportionately harm working-class communities of color by increasing access to power, redistributing and providing additional resources, and eliminating barriers to opportunity.

### **Protect Civic Engagement and Public Accountability**

- ***Protect Voting Access Rights for Infrequent Voters.*** We urge the State to ensure that young people, working-class communities of color, and the unhoused population are fully protected and their options for voting are expanded to include mail, in-person, drop-off ballot voting, and expanded voting periods; ensure mass public education to ensure infrequent voters are fully educated and informed about any shifts in the voting model and their options to cast their ballot; and that equity is centered in implementation, including a) education and outreach, b) in-person voting location placement, c) in-language access, d) support for elderly and disabled voters, and e) preparation for a surge in low-income/low-propensity voters.
- ***Ensure Meaningful Input and Accountability.*** Establish a council made up of leaders from priority communities that reports directly to the Governor, Senate Pro Tempore, and the Speaker of the Assembly. The council will share information on the COVID-19 recovery needs in priority communities as well as concepts for community-led transformation. The council can also help ensure policy and regulatory implementation is accountable to California’s commitment to equity. In addition, all community residents in the State should also be able to access and participate in public decision-making processes (e.g., remote public meetings and hearings in the legislature or at agencies) during the pandemic through strategies such as early notification, longer public comment periods, and multiple access options.
- ***Enable Community Engagement Through Trusted Community Partners.*** Environmental justice groups led the passage of SB 160: Community Emergency Planning (Jackson, 2019), which requires counties to engage communities when updating emergency plans in order to ensure that local disaster preparedness and response activities (i.e., alerts, communications, evacuations, and sheltering) are culturally competent and meet the needs of culturally diverse communities. This pandemic is exposing the importance of social infrastructure and all the ways we all rely on each other for our health, safety, and wellbeing. Residents are turning to established and trusted community-based organizations (CBOs) and other critical institutions for support. Many CBOs are already serving as critical lifelines and resource providers to local communities despite limited resources and have pivoted services and campaigns to respond to the immediate needs of communities. In line with the values of SB 160, we urge the State to provide resources for trusted messengers such as CBOs to conduct outreach to community residents, provide key information, and work with local governments and school districts to ensure a coordinated effort to fulfill community needs.

### **Ensure Data Availability and Accessibility to Target Protections**

- ***Require Collection and Reporting of COVID-19 Cases and Treatment by Race, Income, Age, Gender Identity, and Geography.*** We urge the State to target resources to the populations and communities most impacted by COVID-19 and take into account the systematic and historic burdens placed on these

communities that have exacerbated their exposure to this disease and increased the damage to their health and economic wellbeing.

- **Identify Climate-Vulnerable Populations Through an Integrated Mapping Platform.** California currently lacks a way to identify communities most vulnerable to climate change and crisis in general. Such a tool is needed to help prepare the state for emergencies and proactively protect communities. The development of a climate vulnerability mapping platform integrating scientific projections, socioeconomic factors, and adaptive capacity factors would lay the groundwork needed to protect California's most vulnerable populations from climate disasters so that policymakers can see the full picture and prioritize decision-making accordingly. This effort could integrate information derived from vulnerability assessments of critical infrastructure and public services, focusing on their capacity to withstand changing climate conditions (e.g., electric grid infrastructure).

### **Address Racial Disparities through Structural Interventions**

- **Establish a Statewide Office of Racial Equity.** The Office of Racial Equity would identify and address existing policies and practices in the state that contribute to, uphold, or exacerbate racial disparities. It would also enact measures to support capacity building and provide technical assistance for state agencies to invest in strategies for racial equity, including employee training and support, development of racial equity programming, and assistance to departments to change departmental policies and practices to improve racial equity outcomes.
- **Repeal Proposition 209 - Support ACA 5 (Weber).** Proposition 209 has prevented equal opportunity programs in public contracting, public employment and public education. It's time for us to join the rest of the nation, deliver on our promise of equal opportunity for all, renounce discrimination in all forms, and repeal Proposition 209. We strongly support ACA 5 authored by Assemblymember Shirley Weber and Assemblymember Mike A. Gipson.
- **Expedite Access to Full Scope Medi-Cal for Elders (65+) Regardless of Immigration Status.** We thank Governor Newsom for including the Health4Elders proposal in the initial 2020-21 budget, but are concerned that in his April 2 press briefing he hinted that he might back off from this commitment. Elders in priority communities are a high risk group for experiencing severe complications and even death from COVID-19. The Health4Elders proposal would provide full-scope Medi-Cal to an estimated 27,000 low-income undocumented elders ages 65 and older by removing immigration status as an eligibility exclusion.

## **II. STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS FOR A GREEN STIMULUS**

Low-income families are already experiencing devastating economic impacts from COVID-19. These same families that were already feeling the impact of unemployment, housing vulnerability, and food insecurity now find themselves in an even more perilous situation. We are fighting for a Green New Deal for California that supports the communities hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and invests in a future where we all can thrive. That means an immediate, massive, green stimulus and targeted economic support to local communities to deal with the economic collapse caused by the coronavirus. Funding and quickly deploying programs that can help ease the economic burden and create safer living environments for these families must be a priority. California already operates multiple cost-saving and climate-helping programs that can meet this challenge but more is needed. The following are recommendations for equitable investments and projects that will support communities hit hardest by COVID-19 and climate change.

## **Pursue A Minimum \$10 Billion Economic Stimulus Bond Measure**

We recommend California develop and pass legislation in collaboration with priority communities to help the state recover from COVID-19 and build long-term resilience to climate change as outlined in this letter. To advance equity and address the unique needs of the most vulnerable in our state, the bond proposal must:

- Secure adequate climate resilience funding for projects providing direct and meaningful benefits to priority communities (see below);
- Create a process to define “vulnerable populations” in the context of climate adaptation (see above);
- Include procedural equity provisions to ensure robust and meaningful community engagement, particularly from priority populations;
- Provide funding for capacity building and technical assistance;
- Include strong anti-displacement provisions and other protections for renters, businesses, cultural institutions, and neighborhood-serving facilities;
- Connect workforce training opportunities to jobs created by the bond funding, while prioritizing low-income residents with employment barriers.

## **Invest Bond Funding in Programs that Deliver Meaningful Community Benefits**

With an economy in freefall that is disproportionately affecting priority populations, the Legislature and Administration must carefully balance the new programs created to jumpstart the economy with significant investments in existing programs that have demonstrated success in delivering dollars to under-resourced areas. Bond investments for programs must meet a triple bottom line of (1) creating genuine economic stimulus, (2) meeting community resiliency needs and (3) centering equity to support communities hit hardest by COVID-19 and climate change.

In addition to the new programs we outline below for community resilience centers and distributed clean energy systems, we encourage continued investment in existing programs in light of COVID-19 that we know have a track record of delivering critical and meaningful impact in the places that need it the most. We recommend supporting the Low-Income Weatherization Program, Transformative Climate Communities, and Urban and Community Forestry as foundational programs that meet these criteria and are appropriate for bond investments (see below). These programs must meet minimum investment thresholds in priority communities (35 percent) established by SB 535 (De León, 2012) and AB 1550 (Gomez, 2016) that should now increase to address the devastating impacts of COVID-19.

### *New Programs*

- **Community Resilience Centers.** Emergency funding for neighborhood-based essential service providers offering crisis response is needed to address increased costs and support the uninterrupted delivery of essential social and health resources and outreach services in response to the current pandemic. Grants and subsidies should be offered to community institutions providing emergency response services at eligible existing community facilities such as senior and youth centers, park and recreation sites, libraries, health clinics, schools, food banks, emergency shelters, healthcare centers, and places of worship. In order to protect communities from the additive and immediate threats anticipated from future wildfires, power outages, and evacuations, these community facilities should also be offered funding to secure additional emergency resources and staffing to provide delivery of clean backup power, drinking water, air filters, cooling, food storage, and economic and emergency assistance. This assistance could include financial support for emergency supplies (e.g., water, food, travel support, shelter). Establishment of resilient hubs should involve developing community-based emergency evacuation plans and routes especially for the elderly, disabled, linguistically isolated, and rural communities. Access to these facilities must be intentionally designed to be safe and inclusive to all community residents regardless of immigration status.

- **Distributed Clean Energy Systems.** Distributed clean energy systems (e.g., rooftop solar, storage, demand response, microgrids) are a powerful tool for reducing harm from power outages while at the same time improving air quality and offering economic savings. In the face of growing wildfire threats, this infrastructure is drastically needed for medically dependent residents, working-class communities, and community facilities. We urge the State to further invest in clean, zero-emission, and community-led microgrids that integrate energy efficiency, renewable distributed generation, energy storage, and other technologies in low-income housing and community facilities to protect communities from wildfires and associated power outages.

#### *Foundational Programs*

- **Low-Income Weatherization Program.** The COVID crisis reveals that it is more vital than ever to ensure our residents' homes are healthy, clean, and structurally resilient. Housing retrofits, such as those delivered through the Low-Income Weatherization Program, improve ventilation, energy efficiency, weatherization, and hardening to support affordable and high-quality public housing units. Streamlining delivery of energy upgrades and home health remediation efforts is also being undertaken with the implementation of APEN-sponsored bill AB 1232: Healthy Homes Act (Gloria, 2019), which will ensure that disadvantaged communities can access and maximize these integrated benefits quickly. Other strategies to promote home-based resilience that could be integrated alongside this program include offering financial support for air conditioning access and use to combat the health impacts of extreme heat as well as innovative insurance policies to finance pre- and post-disaster home repairs.
- **Urban and Community Forestry/Urban Greening.** Lessons learned during the COVID crisis have only served to reinforce the need to ensure all communities have access to green space and trees to support strong mental and physical health. No less than six studies over the last six weeks have linked air pollution to higher coronavirus death rates and kids with asthma in heavy air pollution areas to greater coronavirus risk.<sup>2</sup> Trees and associated urban green infrastructure are critical human health tools that pull pollutants out of the atmosphere while also mitigating for urban heat islands, reducing risks from flooding, and reducing greenhouse gases.
- **Transformative Climate Communities.** This program advances community-led decision-making to address the needs of residents and achieve local transformation. Multiple emission-reducing services delivered in a coordinated way – like affordable solar-powered housing with access to public transit and active transportation – can transform long-neglected neighborhoods into models of economic and environmental sustainability. Funding should support development and implementation of robust climate adaptation and resilience plans and projects that are community-driven and respond to community-identified needs.

#### **Support Toxic Site Cleanup to Prevent Contamination**

Investments are needed for the cleanup of toxic sites (including abandoned oil and gas infrastructure, hazardous waste dumping sites, and contaminated former military sites) in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, such as the Chevron Refinery in Richmond and Halaco Superfund site on the coast of Oxnard, not only to protect communities from existing health burdens and contamination risk, but also to address risk of flooding due to sea level rise. Investments should leverage and/or complement existing funds for clean-up of toxic and hazardous sites.

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<sup>2</sup> "New Research Links Air Pollution to Higher Coronavirus Death Rates." New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/climate/air-pollution-coronavirus-covid.html>; "Kids with asthma who live near heavy air pollution face greater risk from coronavirus." Environmental Health News. <https://www.ehn.org/children-asthma-coronavirus-2645618537.html>

## **Deploy Resources to Electrify All Buildings and Transportation**

Electrification can provide environmental and social justice communities access to major benefits such as cleaner air, healthier homes, good jobs, and empowered workers. Electrification also grants access to affordable clean transportation and energy to reduce monthly energy bills, while helping the state meet its climate goals, including a net-zero carbon economy and 100 percent clean electricity by 2045. While electrification has promising benefits for residents and for the state, the rollout of policies at both the local and state level must be undertaken equitably. Decision makers must ensure that environmental and social justice communities are supported to transition to all-electric homes and transportation. In electrifying homes, decision makers should also follow the "[Equitable Building Electrification Framework](#)" which includes assessing communities' needs, establishing community-led decision-making, developing metrics and a plan for tracking, ensuring funding and program leveraging and improving outcomes.

## **Invest in Clean and Affordable Transportation**

- **Low Carbon Transportation Equity Programs.** Electric vehicle equity programs have proven health and economic benefits for families and communities. These programs create innovative clean mobility strategies including electric car share and micromobility options that provide alternate modes of connection between people and their jobs.
- **Clean Trucks and Buses.** There are currently 1.9 million heavy duty trucks operating on California's roads, facilitating goods movement that contributes to air pollution and toxic health outcomes which disproportionately impact low-income communities of color. To mitigate these impacts California must continue to invest in the electrification of trucks and buses.
- **Immediate Fare-Free Services.** In this crisis, transit operators taking fares from riders is downright dangerous both to transit operators and passengers who need to be practicing social distancing. Right now, the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit) and Santa Clara Valley Transit Agency have both waived fares for services. Other agencies need incentives to do this, which is another reason why emergency funding for transit is critical. This should also include small rural community-led rideshare programs in addition to existing public systems. Fare-free services should also be required during climate disasters such as wildfires or heat waves, especially for priority populations.
- **Permanent Free Transit Passes for Vulnerable Riders.** In the long run, the State should formally establish fare-free transit passes for youth, college students, and seniors using the funding sources listed below. This approach is a critical part of the recovery package that will help vulnerable populations get back to school, reach jobs, and access healthcare.

The emergency transit funding from the federal government will not be sufficient and the state of California must provide additional support both for short-term emergency relief and for our long-term recovery efforts. Funding to pursue this and other transit operations strategies include:

- **Pass emergency legislation** that temporarily moves all funds from the Transit and Intercity Rail and Capital Program, a competitive grant program for large capital projects, to the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program, which distributes state funding to nearly every California transit agency. California must shift funding from expanding new transit stations to instead prioritizing immediate, essential bus and rail operations.
- **Redirect all legally-moveable funds (minus bicycle and pedestrian projects)** from the State Transportation Improvement Program, and a minimum of 30 percent of the Trade Corridor Enhancement and Solutions

for Congested Corridors programs, to transit operations. This transfer would provide \$180 million to keep transit running while maintaining funding to improve biking and walking infrastructure – both of which is critical to keep our population healthy and well-connected to transit.

### **Oppose Regulatory Rollbacks and Delays That Weaken Protections**

Some of the state’s biggest polluters are using this public health emergency as an excuse to weaken public health protections. Weakening or delaying needed health-based standards would damage both our economy and our health. Smart regulatory standards drive innovation and save lives and money. While the Trump Administration continues, even during this crisis, to roll back sensible standards at the behest of polluters, California must stand firm in defense of public health. State government and agencies must provide strong leadership at this time and not allow industry or local regulators to backslide on science-based solutions that provide measurable health, environmental, and economic benefits. Failure to follow through on planned reductions in emissions would result in thousands of premature deaths and preventable illnesses, as well as the threat of federal sanctions for failure to attain the legally enforceable standards set under the Clean Air Act.

### **III. ACHIEVING ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY**

There is no better time than now to deploy strategic investments that create family-sustaining green jobs and accelerate our transition away from fossil fuels. Investing in strategies that put impacted workers and businesses back to work to reboot and strengthen our society and economy has to be a focal part of our recovery plan. All levels of government should be exploring ways to massively invest in planet-saving infrastructure and do so in meaningful collaboration with priority communities that have historically borne the brunt of poverty and pollution. The following recovery strategies should be implemented to help communities that are most impacted by COVID-19 and climate change achieve economic resilience.

#### **Invest In Resilient Workforce Development and Training**

Achieving resilient communities requires more than strengthening built infrastructure and protecting natural resources; it focuses on bolstering our community roots to address climate change. The State must focus on strengthening social networks within communities, coordinating with local governments, providing resilience-building programs and services, and training workers and community members to respond to shocks. The crisis we are facing has put a spotlight on the critical importance of investing in care workers who are on the frontlines of fighting this virus and keep our communities functioning. We need to rebuild the capacity of the public sector, the healthcare system, and community-based responses.

- ***Expand Labor Protections to Workers in the Informal Economy.*** Ensure non-traditional workers such as domestic workers, nannies, housekeepers, gardeners, lawn and garden care, agricultural workers and day laborers are afforded with labor protections. As an immediate opportunity, we urge you to support and pass SB 1257 (Durazo): Health and Safety for All Workers Act, which would remove the historical exclusion of "household domestic service" from the worker protections provided under Cal/OSHA.
- ***Support Homecare Workers.*** Homecare workers such as in-home healthcare workers and personal care aides are on the frontlines of resilience for many of our most vulnerable populations. COVID-19 is most dangerous for typical recipients of in-home care, including the elderly, disabled, and immuno-compromised. Because of their physical proximity to others and high exposure to disease, homecare workers themselves are also among the most vulnerable workers. Significant measures should be taken to protect both homecare workers and their clients. Recommended actions include: training homecare workers to respond to disaster and emergency scenarios; leveraging the homecare workforce to help coordinate, facilitate, and communicate with local government and other community

organizations; providing free health and safety supplies; improving wages and benefits; and guaranteeing paid sick leave.

- **Expand the Public Sector Workforce.** A robust public sector is essential to effectively responding to any shock event. The public sector is responsible for providing crucial social services that form the safety net for our most vulnerable populations. A larger and well-trained public sector workforce dedicated to resilience would strengthen communities and increase their capacity for a coordinated and effective emergency response. Recommended actions include: increasing staffing for public health, social services, and community wellness departments; investing in workplace safety protections (e.g., personal protective equipment); developing protocols to ensure communication and coordination between relevant government departments and community advocates; increasing workforce for frontline public health workers including social workers, public health nurses, community health nurses, counselors, and educators; and training public sector workers to respond to a variety of emergency and disaster scenarios.
- **Invest in High Road Training Partnership and High Road Construction Careers Programs.** Through industry-based, worker-focused training partnerships, the California Workforce Development Board is expanding career pathways in the low-carbon economy for workers that have long been excluded from stable, healthy, family-supporting jobs. These strategies include pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and incumbent worker training with robust wrap-around services. The funding will also pilot worker retraining and transition assistance for sectors and regions facing climate change impacts, further increasing economic security and climate resilience for vulnerable communities. We support ongoing investment in these programs for the Workforce Development Board.
- **Explore Establishing a Jobs Guarantee.** Guaranteeing employment to all state residents willing to work must be a priority for our state government. Millions of Californians are already out of work and may be soon joined by many more. At the same time we will need a robust workforce for the near-term COVID-19 recovery and for the long-term climate fight. Californians looking to get back to work can do so by meeting community-identified needs in the public and non-profit sectors to take up any slack in private for-profit sector employment. These will include jobs in sustainable energy and energy efficiency retrofitting, mass transit and “complete streets” that promote safe bike and pedestrian traffic, electric vehicle charging infrastructure deployment, regional food systems based on sustainable organic agriculture, urban green infrastructure that promotes resiliency and opportunity for at-risk youth, clean manufacturing, infrastructure, and public services (education, youth programs, child care, senior care, etc.).
- **Create Markets for California-Made Products.** The state government spends millions of dollars each year to purchase goods and services. We should require whenever possible for the government to purchase California-made products, and use large state procurement commitments as a tool to create demand for new California-made sustainable goods and to develop particular domestic clean energy industries. These requirements should include farmworkers. To guarantee that California purchasing power results in family-sustaining jobs, the State should require all procurement to include the following requirements:
  - Pay all employees at least \$15 per hour;
  - Guarantee employees at least 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave;
  - Maintain fair scheduling practices;
  - Ensure that employees may exercise collective bargaining rights, such as by posting notices of collective bargaining rights and maintaining complete neutrality with regard to union organizing; and
  - Employ individuals with barriers to employment and contract with minority-, women-, LGBTQ-, and veteran-owned business enterprises.

### **Support Small, Locally-Based Businesses**

Small businesses have been upended since January, especially in Chinatown districts where racially-motivated fears of the coronavirus have lowered the influx of visitors and local communities. In response, owners are slashing working hours, laying off staff, shutting their doors, and requesting lower rent to stay afloat. The State should prioritize assistance for disadvantaged, underserved, minority-owned, immigrant-owned, and local businesses through the following supports:

- ***Expand Public and Employee Ownership.*** Leverage existing public agency spending to invest in sustainable businesses including cooperatives and non-profits by providing contracts, grants and loans with an emphasis on small, locally-based companies that keep the wealth created by local labor circulating in the community rather than being drained off to enrich absentee investors.
- ***Subsidies and Grants.*** Offer automatic, rapid-response subsidies and payroll advances as a preferred funding over loans.
- ***Community-Based Organization Outreach.*** Fund local CBOs to do multilingual and culturally competent outreach and provide assistance to small business borrowers.
- ***Loan Payments.*** Allow lenders to suspend loan payments, restructure loans, and relax underwriting requirements.
- ***Rent and Utilities.*** Suspend evictions, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs for small businesses.
- ***Taxes and Fees.*** Delay business tax collection and waiving business fees.

The State must also ensure equitable access to these resources for undocumented immigrants who compose 10% of California's diverse workforce. The Social Entrepreneurs for Economic Development (SEED) Initiative, which was included in the proposed state budget in January, presents a significant opportunity for an inclusive economic recovery. The SEED Initiative would provide access to micro-grants and culturally and linguistically effective training and support to start (or restart) socially responsible businesses and worker cooperatives. By funding this state program, immigrant entrepreneurs who have already made significant economic contributions can make a livelihood while helping revitalize the state and local economy.

### **Provide Economic Relief through Housing and Utilities Assistance**

- ***Enact a Statewide Moratorium on All Evictions and Rent Increases.*** This moratorium should support renters for the duration of this crisis and ensure at least a three-month recovery period. It should apply even for cases when the tenant cannot meet the documentation requirements, evictions alleging other breaches of a lease, and no-fault evictions. We also request the Governor immediately direct all county and city marshals and sheriffs to cease executing writs of possession until further notice.
- ***Rent Forgiveness and Mortgage Suspension.*** To the maximum extent possible, the State should work with financial institutions to continue suspending mortgage payments for homeowners and landlords, and pursue options to forgive rent obligations for the duration of the crisis, including a recovery period after the state of emergency is lifted. Economic relief and displacement protections should not be limited to property owners – the State must also prioritize the tenants who are at grave risk of losing their homes without rent forgiveness.
- ***Emergency Rental Assistance.*** To the extent that unpaid rent is not forgiven, the State should ensure that rental assistance is available after the eviction moratorium expires. An emergency rental assistance program should be created to minimize the burden on low-income tenants and is predicated on the landlord's compliance with all health, safety, and habitability laws. Emergency rental or mortgage assistance should be available to backfill a substantial share of any income lost to any worker during this crisis, whether or not they become sick themselves, and regardless of classification as an employee or

contractor. In anticipation of future climate disasters, the State should also establish post-disaster safety net funding for displaced low-income renters.

- **Ensure Inclusive and Sustained Moratorium on Disconnections.** We urge the State to ensure shutoff prohibitions extend and apply to all public and private utilities and service providers beyond CPUC-regulated providers including electric, gas, and water municipal corporations, municipal utility districts, and public utility districts. We also urge the State to confirm that electric and gas utilities have reconnected any customers who were previously disconnected due for nonpayment. This suspension of shutoffs and restoration of services should remain in place for at least a one-year recovery period beyond the end date of the state of emergency to allow families to recover financially from unemployment and other economic impacts.
- **Debt Relief for Utility Customers.** Without a cancellation of debt accrued during the crisis, the State will experience a wave of disconnections when billing resumes due to households' inability to develop savings during this time. All utilities and service providers should forgive customer debt to support economic stability among impacted communities.
- **Exclude Cost Recovery from Ratepayers of Customer Protections.** The State should ensure that costs incurred by utilities in implementing customer protections in response to COVID-19 are not passed on to ratepayers, resulting in further increased rates.

### **Expand Access to Free Telehealth Services**

Telehealth services are critical during shelter-in-place to give families access to health screenings and to reduce the burden of in-person patient visits. The Legislature should waive telehealth medical fees and copays during this time to encourage more Californians to seek preventative screening and consultation and stop the spread of COVID-19.

### **Bridge the Digital Divide**

Many low-income households have limited access to affordable technology and internet services and rely on schools, internet cafes, and other community facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposes the threats of this digital divide. Technology and internet service is critical for getting up-to-date health and safety information, supporting remote student learning, finding and accessing emergency resources, and engaging in public decision-making processes. Immediate solutions include banning disconnections for nonpayment, ensuring phone and other offline mechanisms for accessing economic relief programs, leveraging internet services at community facilities as public Wi-Fi hotspots, and providing funding to nonprofits and CBOs that can help meet household technology needs. The State should also consider implementing a statewide all-fiber infrastructure project to help bridge the digital divide.

We urge our state leaders and the Task Force to act quickly to make sure that everyone has a stable home to shelter in, hot water and electricity, the ability to vote safely, and environmental health protections. As organizations committed to advancing environmental justice and racial equity, our goal is to support communities to withstand systemic crises and disasters and ensure a just recovery that transforms harmful systems and creates opportunities to thrive. We look forward to collaborating with you to enable these solutions.

Sincerely,

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