

**** Email Transmittal ****

February 1, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman, Senate Budget Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Yarmuth
Chairman, House Budget Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Chairmen Sanders and Yarmuth,

On behalf of People's Action, a national network of **40 state and local grassroots, power-building organizations in 30 states**, we are submitting our core priorities for the next round of emergency COVID relief needs – priorities that are long overdue. This past election cycle, People's Action conducted the largest deep canvass program in the country to elect President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. We made 40+ million total voter contact attempts, including 280,000 deep canvass phone conversations with moveable voters. We mobilized this effort to create a context for relief and recovery at the scale of the crisis before us and need the Democratic majority to act immediately.

We believe the \$1.9 trillion in expenditures outlined in President Biden's *American Rescue Plan* must be the floor, and not the ceiling.

Considering the scale and longstanding nature of our public health and economic crisis, a scaled-back COVID relief package would be a big miss.

Instead, we look to you to ensure that people get the relief they need and voted for. We are seeking a recovery that is equitable, and helps address longstanding racial disparities driven by bad policy.

While we understand the hopes of some bipartisan agreement, *we do not support sacrificing the needs of people for it*. The recently won Democratic majority should use all the tools necessary to provide what is required. We support utilizing the budget reconciliation process to advance this critical agenda if Republicans refuse to support the scale of relief that is necessary. We need a bold relief package to be finalized before the March 14th Unemployment Insurance benefit cliff and the expiration of the National Eviction Moratorium at the close of March.

People's Action's top priorities for this next round of relief include:

- **Recurring Cash Payments:** recurring monthly \$2,000 checks for those in need throughout the pandemic, including adult dependents and ITIN-holders;
- **Strengthened Eviction Moratorium & Rent Cancellation/Debt Forgiveness:** an expanded eviction moratorium that bans all eviction filings, summons, hearings, judgments, and writs of execution; rent & mortgage cancellation and debt forgiveness; if rental assistance is increased, it must be with conditions; guaranteed non-congregate emergency housing available for all throughout the pandemic;
- **Healthcare & Vaccines:** full coverage of healthcare costs for all until we are fully recovered from the pandemic (ideally in a public program such as Medicare, and must extend well beyond the low impact of COBRA subsidies); free and fair distribution of vaccines, achieved by dramatically increasing supply through the use of powers in 28 U.S.C. § 1498 and the Defense Production Act;
- **Overdose Prevention:** include an additional appropriation of \$58 million for syringe service programs (SSPs) and other harm reduction services to address the overdose crisis through the CDC opioid and infectious diseases program line and remove the ban on the use of federal funds to purchase syringes and other related supplies;
- **Public Jobs Expansion:** public health resilience jobs focusing on delivering the vaccine and addressing health disparities as well as care jobs to support families in this moment; more job creation will be sought in the recovery package to follow;
- **Student Debt Relief:** cancellation of up to \$50,000 in student debt per borrower; extending the pause on student debt payments through the duration of the pandemic, and include those left out of this relief: private student loan borrowers, and those with commercially-held loans and Perkins loans;
- **Minimum Wage Increase:** increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and ending the tipped minimum wage and sub-minimum wage for people with disabilities; and
- **State & Local Support:** significant state & local government funding, including tribal communities and U.S. territories, to preserve critical jobs and essential services our communities depend on during the pandemic.

Other critical relief elements we support are: immigrant inclusion in ALL benefits; a pathway to citizenship for essential workers and their families, immigrant youth, and TPS recipients; an extension (linked to the economy, not an arbitrary date) and boost of Unemployment Insurance (back up to the additional \$600/week); paid sick day expansion and paid family & medical leave; an increase in SNAP benefits, and support for small businesses.

We support an initial prioritization of the emergency relief needs that remain unmet; immediately following that, we are anxious to focus on an equitable and transformative recovery. We support the **THRIVE Agenda** (thethriveagenda.com) - a bold plan for economic renewal that will create millions of jobs for a just, healthy and equitable society. The THRIVE Agenda was introduced as a resolution in 2020 that many Members of Congress supported; more specifics will be released soon. And, **ending the filibuster may be required to** advance the bold agenda needed; we support that.

Should you have questions about these priorities or want to meet with People's Action to discuss further partnerships in advancing this agenda, please reach out to our Campaigns Director, Sondra Youdelman (s.youdelman@peoplesaction.org) or our Director of D.C. Strategy, Joy Blackwood (j.blackwood@peoplesaction.org).

On behalf of our 40 member organizations,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "GEORGE GOEHL". The letters are somewhat stylized and overlapping.

George Goehl
Director, People's Action