



HISPANIC BAR ASSOCIATION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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July 7, 2020

Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510
The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Re: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Hispanic Population in the U.S.

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

On behalf of the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia (“HBA-DC”), we write to express our concerns regarding the absence of relief that the Hispanic U.S. population continues to experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hispanic community in the United States is once again being left behind in a time of economic turmoil brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Early data shows that the Hispanic community is not receiving the information and treatment necessary to lessen transmission and prevent deaths from COVID-19. To protect the Hispanic community and other vulnerable communities, we urge Congress and the Trump Administration to take steps to ensure that testing, treatment, and economic assistance are distributed equitably.

The COVID-19 crisis has shed light on – and exacerbated – the healthcare access and economic inequities that the Hispanic community has historically experienced in the United States. In 42 states, plus Washington D.C., the Hispanic population make up a greater share of confirmed cases than their share of the population. In eight states, it is more than four times greater.¹ Before the pandemic, Hispanics were three times as likely to be uninsured as non-Hispanic whites.² The lack of healthcare access perpetuates disparity in a community that has

¹Maria Godoy and Daniel Wood, *What Do Coronavirus Racial Disparities Look Like State By State?*, NPR (May 30, 2020, 6:00 AM), <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/05/30/865413079/what-do-coronavirus-racial-disparities-look-like-state-by-state>.

² *COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Jun. 4, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>.

prevalent underlying health conditions like diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure. Furthermore, Hispanic individuals are less likely to seek out healthcare, often seeing it only as a last resort.³ This healthcare access disparity created a more vulnerable population going into the pandemic, and in the era of trillion-dollar business bailouts, Congress has taken insufficient steps to protect the Hispanic community.

Limited data is telling us that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on communities of color. For example in New York City, Hispanic patients are dying at the second highest rate, 45.3 per 100,000.⁴ This disproportionate impact is also showing up in less congested areas such as Hamilton County, Tennessee, where 49% of the cases are Hispanic despite comprising only 6% of the population.⁵ Additional data is needed to study and address the full extent of COVID-19's impact on vulnerable communities, particularly communities of color. To prevent long term racial inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, Congress must take action to ensure that race-focused data is collected nationwide.

Economically, Hispanics are suffering the most - reporting nearly 19% unemployment, the highest of any other racial or ethnic group.⁶ In a recent survey, the Census Bureau found that 61% of Hispanic households report someone losing income since March 13th.⁷ If this economic gap continues to be unchecked, the outcome will result in crippling economic loss that will take generations to undo. It is important that Congress passes legislation to ease the pain and help prevent a greater economic disaster.

We urge Congress and the Trump Administration to take these additional steps to help Hispanic and minority communities:

- Expand access to quality health care: Allow states to provide Coronavirus testing, treatment and, when available, vaccines through emergency Medicaid.
- Ensure equitable access to health facts: It is important that health services, information about the Coronavirus, and how to access benefit programs are available through multiple languages.

³ Domingo Garcia and Juan Proaño, *COVID-19 Legislative Action Plan Addressing the Needs Of The Latino Community*, LULAC (Apr. 14, 2020), https://lulac.org/covid19/LULAC_COVID-19_Latino_Impact_Report.pdf.

⁴ *COVID-19 Deaths- Race-Ethnicity*, Bureau of Communicable Disease Surveillance System (Apr. 16, 2020), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-deaths-race-ethnicity-04162020-1.pdf>.

⁵ Wyatt Massey, *New data shows half of all COVID-19 cases in Hamilton County are in the Hispanic Community*, Chattanooga Times Free Press, (May 19, 2020, 6:53PM), <https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2020/may/19/new-data-shows-half-all-covid-19-cases-hamilton-county-are-hispanic-community/523342/>

⁶ Suzanne Gamboa, *Latinos Hardest Hit by Coronavirus Job Losses, With a Staggering 18.9% Unemployed*, NBC (May 8, 2020, 11:27 AM), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latinos-hardest-hit-coronavirus-job-losses-staggering-18-9-unemployed-n1202881>.

⁷ *Household Pulse Survey: May 21 - May 26*, U.S. Census Bureau (Jun. 3, 2020) <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp4.html#tables>.

- Protect workers: We need a national plan to ensure that workers in essential industries have proper protective equipment, especially for service industry jobs which 25% of Hispanics hold.⁸
- Feed struggling families: Ensure access to nutrition assistance through programs like the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and extend the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer into the fall.
- Prevent families from going homeless. Without additional renter's assistance and protection, when the federal moratorium on evictions ends on July 24th, families will be left without the means to prevent homelessness. Hispanic families are twice as likely to rent as are whites, with only 49% of Hispanic households living in homes they own.⁹
- Supplement state and local budgets, mandating that a portion of the funds are utilized to ensure affordable housing and other safety-net resources, fund public education, and maintain appropriate levels of public transportation.

Families are struggling now and while Congress plays politics, the Hispanic community is suffering irreparable harm. We appreciate your prompt attention to the requests we have made and urge Congress and the Administration to take immediate action on these issues and on a broader stimulus package to ease the pain on the broader economy. The Hispanic community needs your help.

Respectfully Yours,



Ruben F. Reyna
President
Hispanic Bar Association of DC

CC: The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton

⁸ *COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Jun. 4, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>.

⁹ Katy O'Donnell, *Black Community Braces for Next Threat: Mass Evictions*, Politico (Jun. 12, 2020, 4:30AM), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/12/mass-evictions-314699?nname=playbook&nid=0000014f-1646-d88f-a1cf-5f46b7bd0000&nrid=0000014c-2413-d9dd-a5ec-34bf90730005&nlid=630318>.