



COVID-19 RELIEF PRIORITIES

A growing number of reports on how COVID-19 is impacting Black people illustrate the predictable results of past choices about policy. For decades, those policies exacerbated racial inequality in work, health, wealth, and education. And those policies are now enabling COVID-19 to harm Black people—and disrupt Black community life—at far greater rates than for anyone else.

The impact is evident in high rates of infection and death among Black people, as well as in rates of loss among Black workers and business owners.¹ The deep health and economic disparities that existed before COVID-19 left Black people exposed, and the virus is deepening those disparities with each passing day. Worse, it has proven fertile ground for those who wish to employ hate speech and antidemocratic tactics of voter disenfranchisement.

In response, Color Of Change has launched *The Black Response*, mobilizing our 1.7 million members to advocate for immediate and meaningful interventions to ensure Black people have access to adequate relief measures, and that resources to fight the virus' impact are distributed equitably.

As Congress takes up the next set of coronavirus stimulus packages, Color Of Change calls for relief that provides the following:

¹ *The Coronavirus Is Infecting and Killing Black Americans at an Alarming High Rate*, Washington Post (April 7, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/04/07/coronavirus-is-infecting-killing-black-americans-an-alarming-high-rate-post-analysis-shows/?arc404=true); *The Economic Impact of COVID-19 Will Hit Minorities The Hardest*, Forbes (Mar. 17, 2020) (online at www.forbes.com/sites/korihale/2020/03/17/the-economic-impact-of-covid-19-will-hit-minorities-the-hardest/#1b34a46710c0).



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IMMEDIATE ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE FOR CORONAVIRUS TREATMENT

- **Guarantee that COVID-19 testing and care reaches Black communities.**

Testing and treatment must be universally accessible if we are going to beat the pandemic, and for it to be universal, many Black communities and other communities need care to be free.

- **Analyze and respond to the disparate health impacts of COVID-19.**

It is essential that health departments collect and report racial data on COVID-19 testing, quality of care, and deaths with disaggregated racial data that is de-identified. This data will ensure that our needs are visible, and that the right level of resources are deployed to address them. We must ensure, however, that this data is not used to further exploit people. For example, this data should be barred from alternative use such as setting insurance rates or for law enforcement.

INCREASED SUPPORT FOR BLACK-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES

- **Ensure that small business relief reaches Black-owned businesses.**

We urge Congress to adopt the following solutions to ensure that adequate funding reaches Black business owners:

- **Funding for small business grants, not loans, that will allow for Black-owned businesses to retain and rehire their workforce and reopen after the health crisis.** This includes funds for direct payroll support, as well as covering all costs to maintain the business.
- **Eliminate large banks as a bottleneck to necessary support.** Racial inequities in the lending markets have caused a lack of capital in Black-owned businesses. Making sure that small businesses, especially Black owned businesses, can maintain payroll through direct transfers, rather than loans, will ensure these businesses can survive the crisis, get money into the hands of people more quickly, and relieve the strain on a patchwork of state unemployment systems.



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- **Mandate a Congressional oversight panel to ensure that small business funds are reaching Black-owned businesses.**
- **Create targeted support funds for Black businesses.** Any additional funding for small business support should include a substantial dedicated fund for supporting minority-owned businesses.

EMERGENCY ONGOING MONTHLY CASH ASSISTANCE

- **Secure recurring monthly cash payments for those most vulnerable until the economy recovers.** Even before COVID-19, current economic policies championed by corporate lobbyists and business practices that circumvent pre existing civil rights laws have resulted in 8% of the Black community earning wages below the poverty line, compared to just 4% of White workers.² Employers shutting down or laying off workers in response to the virus has exacerbated economic uncertainty in Black communities, It is, therefore, vital that stimulus packages include universal, unconditional recurring monthly cash payments through the remainder of this health crisis and resulting recession.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Pressure ventilator manufacturers to put lives above profit.** Ventilator manufacturers must implement policies that allow for hospitals to repair and reuse ventilators to combat shortages as a result of the COVID-19 health pandemic.
- **Protect individuals and families while securing strings-attached bailouts.** Any governmental relief to corporate and financial institutions should be contingent upon and proportionate to direct relief they provide to borrowers, customers, and workers for the duration of the crisis, including collection, overdraft and penalty relief, job security, and governance makeup.

² *The Economic Impact of COVID-19 Will Hit Minorities The Hardest*, Forbes (Mar. 17, 2020) (online at www.forbes.com/sites/korihale/2020/03/17/the-economic-impact-of-covid-19-will-hit-minorities-the-hardest/#1b34a46710c0).



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TECH, PRIVACY, AND MEDIA JUSTICE

- **Hold tech companies accountable for their outsized impact on society.** The swell of incidents such as racist “Zoom bombings” has only underscored how lack of data security disproportionately affects the Black community. Robust enforcement from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and strong Congressional oversight is needed to ensure robust digital privacy protections and that platforms are held responsible for the proliferation of harmful disinformation.
- **Stop “health surveillance systems” that disrupt privacy rights under false pretenses of COVID-19 prevention.** The Trump Administration and companies like Apple and Google are reportedly developing surveillance tools to monitor and track individuals who have been in contact with the Coronavirus or are seeking testing and treatment. This raises serious privacy concerns; the effects of this surveillance will go far beyond this pandemic, Law enforcement already disproportionately surveils and polices the Black community, who will be further harmed by this privacy power grab.

ENSURE ADEQUATE SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

- **Take action to reduce the number of incarcerated people.** Jails, prisons and detention centers are woefully ill-equipped for health emergencies, particularly highly contagious diseases such as COVID-19. To keep individuals safe and healthy, Congress should immediately act to release incarcerated people in federal facilities and provide resources to states and localities to support decarceration. Additionally, policies must provide transition and re-entry support services to individuals released from places of incarceration.
- **Expand access to soap, hand sanitizers, adequate health care and supplies in places of incarceration.**



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WORKER JUSTICE

- **Increase worker pay and safety protection for those working in essential industries.** Black workers are disproportionately deemed “essential” and working on the front lines of this pandemic. Despite the recognition of the critical role these workers play in keeping others safe from exposure to COVID-19, they are woefully underpaid and lack basic supplies like masks and hand sanitizers, to work safely. Lawmakers must demand that companies like Uber, Instacart, Amazon, and others that employ front-line workers, immediately implement strong safety protocols and increase wages.

VOTING RIGHTS

- **Allocate additional funds and resources for election support and vote by mail.** The April 7 Wisconsin primary election was an ugly preview of how the pandemic may be used to force Black voters’ choice between their right to vote and their health. To illustrate, the Black community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is facing the brunt of the coronavirus pandemic, accounting for almost 70% of the dead while making up only 26% of the population.³
- The next stimulus measure must defend our democratic process by protecting the U.S. Postal Service and funding a robust vote-by-mail including covering the cost of postage.

DEBT RELIEF AND CREDIT PROTECTION

- **Implement meaningful debt relief and forgiveness.** Almost 85% of African Americans have student loan debt, compared to 69% of white Americans.⁴ At a time when many are struggling to pay their bills, lawmakers must implement a debt reprieve by cancelling student loans with forgiveness provisions for other acquired household debt.

³The Coronavirus Is Infecting and Killing Black Americans at an Alarming High Rate, Washington Post (April 7, 2020) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/04/07/coronavirus-is-infecting-killing-black-americans-an-alarmingly-high-rate-post-analysis-shows/?arc404=true).

⁴Student Loan Debt Weighs Heavier On Black Borrowers, Fed Says, CBS News (Nov. 15, 2019) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/the-federal-reserve-bank-black-college-students-are-carrying-more-loan-debt/).



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- **Suspend all debt collection activities and referrals to debt buyers.** Creditors should make broad allowances for consumers, small businesses, and nonprofit organizations who cannot make payments in a timely fashion due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Freeze derogatory credit reporting.** Lawmakers should enact a freeze on derogatory credit reporting so that the pressure of the economic downturn does not create a lasting legacy of further denying Black people access to affordable credit.

HOUSING AND RENTAL SUPPORT

- **Secure additional funding for rental support and rent moratoriums.** Lawmakers must take action to provide adequate funds for housing and national rent moratoriums during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Foreclosure moratoriums and mortgage protection.** While the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) have suspended foreclosures for at least 60 days for government-backed mortgages, many mortgages do not fall within these categories. It is necessary to protect all at-risk mortgages to prevent equity losses to avoid perpetuating a greater Black wealth gap.