



July 23, 2020

The Honorable Charles Schumer
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: The Pandemic TANF Assistance Act (S. 3672) (Wyden, OR)

Dear Senators Schumer and Gillibrand:

As negotiations start for the next COVID-19 relief package, we request that a flexible emergency fund targeted to individuals and families with the lowest incomes be included in your list of priorities. New York State, along with other states, is currently reeling from the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Approximately half of lower-income households in the United States reported job or wage loss due to the novel coronavirus.¹
- In New York State, seasonally adjusted unemployment rose to an unprecedented 14.5% in April 2020, consistent with the national average.²
- In New York State, 2.5 million people are already food insecure, more than a million of whom reside in New York City.³ One in four New York City residents is food insecure as a result of the pandemic.⁴
- Since the onset of COVID-19, applications for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) in New York have increased between 200% and 300% in different regions of the state.⁵ New York City has experienced a three-fold increase in SNAP applications since the Governor issued a "stay-at-home" order in the third week of March.⁶
- Nationally, 24.7 million adults in mortgaged or rented households reported a late or deferred housing payment in May. This includes one in eight adults in mortgaged households and one in six adults in rental households. Adults in households with children report higher proportions. At the national level, one in six adults in mortgaged households with children and one in four adults in rental households with children reported either a late or deferred payment.⁷

- Unemployment and temporary loss of work are affecting 16% of parents of young children in New York. Even among employed parents, a third (34%) have had their hours or pay reduced or have taken time off work to care for their child or children as a result of the crisis, and two-thirds (67%) say they worry about losing their jobs or having their hours reduced in the future. A majority (57%) worry about not being able to pay for basic expenses like food, housing, and health care if the crisis continues.⁸
- Over a third of parents (34%) say they have skipped or reduced the size of their own meals as a result of the coronavirus crisis, and that number is significantly higher among furloughed workers (49%), middle-income parents (48%), single parents (46%), parents in New York City (45%), and Hispanic parents (42%) in the State. Overall, 11% of parents have skipped or reduced the size of the meals they provide for their children as well, which disproportionately affects parents of children enrolled in Early Head Start (36%), single parents (27%), and parents in New York City (22%).⁹

The effects of systemic racism in policy decisions and disinvestment in our communities of color are evident in the hardships these families face every day. Nationally, when the unemployment rate for whites reached 14.2% in April, a historic high, the unemployment rate soared to 16.7% for African Americans and 18.9% for Latinos, the highest on record for this population.¹⁰ The rate of food insecurity among Black households with children is currently **39 percent**; in 2018 it was 25 percent. For Hispanic households with children, the rate is nearly **37 percent**; in 2018 it was just under 17 percent. For white families, the number of families currently facing food insecurity is 22 percent, double what it was before the pandemic.¹¹

The Pandemic TANF Assistance Act (S. 3672), introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden (OR) would address this need. It creates a new grants program—The Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant program—that would provide \$10 billion to states, territories and tribes to address the unmet needs of families and individuals with the lowest incomes. Importantly, this fund would allow New York to provide emergency assistance to families and individuals that have been left out of other relief measures, including immigrants, individuals returning from jail or prison and survivors of domestic violence, and young people from low-income neighborhoods just entering the labor market, among others. Limited savings, longer periods of joblessness, higher food and utility costs have stretched their already-limited budgets to the breaking point, leaving many unable to pay rent and without enough food to eat.

The Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant Program would provide funds that could be used to provide eligible families with short-term cash, non-cash and in-kind assistance to address their basic needs, or for subsidized employment at the appropriate time that is safe and consistent with public health guidance.

The minor cost of the bill, relative to other important economic relief efforts, would have a significant benefit for those in need. For individuals and families on the margins, these funds could prevent a downward spiral that would create even greater hardship and higher long-term costs for us all. The funds would avoid evictions, foreclosure, and utility cut-offs;

prevent children from being removed from their homes; provide resources for families to buy necessities like food, diapers, and personal hygiene supplies; and prevent the mental and physical health issues that accompany extreme stress.

I hope we can count on you to make sure that resources are included in the COVID-19 package to help individuals and families with the least, many of whom are people of color. The Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant Program currently in the Pandemic TANF Assistance Act would meet those needs. Thank you for being a champion for families and individuals with the lowest incomes whose needs are too often forgotten during times of crisis.

Sincerely,

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
Empire Justice Center
Prevent Child Abuse NY
Adirondack Foundation - Birth to Three Alliance
Allegany County United Way
Alliance for Quality Education
Chautauqua Lake Child Care Center
Chenango United Way
Chenango United Way
Children's Defense Fund
Choice for All
Church Women United in New York State
Citizen Action of New York
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
COFCCA
Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)
Early Care & Learning Council
Fiscal Policy Institute
Food Bank For New York City
MercyFirst
Neighborhood Trust Financial Partners
New York State Network for Youth Success
NYS American Academy of Pediatrics, Chapters 1, 2 & 3
NYS Kinship Navigator
The Children's Agenda
The Legal Aid Society
United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
United Way of Greater Oswego County
United Way of New York State
United Way of Seneca County
United Way of the Dutchess-Orange Region
United Way of Ulster County
United Way of Westchester and Putnam
Western New York Law Center

¹ Kim Parker et al., *About Half of Lower-Income Americans Report Job or Wage Loss Due to COVID-19*, Pew Research Ctr. (Apr. 21, 2020), <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/04/21/about-half-of-lower-income-americans-report-household-job-or-wage-loss-due-to-covid-19/>.

² New York State Department of Labor, “State Labor Department Releases Preliminary April 2020 Unemployment Rates,” (May 27, 2020), available online at <https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/pressreleases/prlaus.shtm>.

³ Food Bank For New York City, “Reflections of Hunger from the Front Lines,” November 2018, https://1giqgs400j4830k22r3m4wqg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Legislative-Breakfast_Key_Findings_final.pdf

⁴ Mann, Brian, “In New York City, 2 Million Residents Face Food Insecurity, Officials Say,” National Public Radio (May 21, 2020), available online at <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/21/860312565/in-new-york-city-2-million-residents-face-food-insecurity-officials-say>.

⁵ See, Zremski, Jerry, “Increasing Demand Leads to Calls for Expanding Food Stamp Program,” The Buffalo News (May 20, 2020), available online at <https://buffalonews.com/2020/05/20/increasing-demand-leads-to-calls-for-expanding-food-stamp-program/> (demand for SNAP in Erie County more than doubled in March 2020 and increased by 95% in April 2020); Asymkos, Stephanie, “Never Applied Before: Americans Are Signing Up for Food Stamps in Droves,” (April 17, 2020), available online at <https://money.yahoo.com/americans-are-signing-up-for-food-stamps-in-droves-173356965.html?guccounter=1> (referencing a 200% increase in demand in New York).

⁶ See Testimony of Steven Banks, Commissioner, New York City Dept. of Social Services, Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee, (May 18, 2020) at 3, available online at <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=AO&ID=88356&GUID=9f2636af-a802-46ba-8a4b-a74fb89abc6d&N=SGVhcmluZyBUZXN0aW1vbknkLSBTdGV2ZW4gQmFua3MsiENvbW1pc3Npb25lcg%3d%3d>.

⁷ L. Monte and S. O’Donnell, Adults in Households with Children Report Higher Rate of Late Housing Payment and Food Shortages Amid COVID-19, United State Census Bureau, (June30, 2020) available online at https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/06/the-risks-children-face-during-pandemic.html?utm_campaign=20200701msacos1ccstors&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdeliver

⁸ The Coronavirus Crisis: Supporting Parents with Young Children; Raising NY; April 2020.

⁹ The Coronavirus Crisis: Supporting Parents with Young Children; Raising NY; April 2020.

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Unemployment Rates Rises to Record High 14.7 Percent in April 2020”, available online at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/unemployment-rate-rises-to-record-high-14-point-7-percent-in-april-2020.htm>; Jones, Charisse, “Historic Layoffs Take Biggest Toll on Black, Latinos, Women and the Young,” USA Today (May 8, 2020) available online at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/05/08/covid-19-layoffs-take-toll-women-people-color-and-young/3094964001/>.

¹¹ H.B. Evich, “Stark Racial Disparities Emerge As Families Struggle To Get Enough Food,” Politico, (July 6, 2020), available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/06/racial-disparities-families-struggle-food-348810>.