



Governor Tim Walz  
Office of the Governor  
130 State Capitol  
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St. Paul, MN 55155

Governor Walz,

On behalf of Minnesota's Labor Movement, thank you for your swift and decisive action to protect Minnesotans from the COVID-19 pandemic. You and your administration are providing the leadership Minnesota needs. As the crisis continues, Minnesota's unions are advocating for the following emergency policy priorities to protect working people both in the short and long-term.

**Protect Frontline Workers' Health**

On Tuesday, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) further weakened its guidance on measures to contain COVID-19. These changes include, among other things, rolling back personal protective equipment (PPE) standards from N-95 respirators to allow simple surgical masks. Now is not the time to be weakening our standards or cutting corners. If nurses and health care workers aren't protected, patients and the public are not protected.

The Minnesota Legislature should require hospitals to follow stricter guidelines for PPE standards and require, at the least, N-95 respirators for all health care workers.

The state should also provide sufficient PPE for firefighters, many who do not have enough protective gear to safely first respond to emergencies. Home care workers interacting with COVID-19 positive clients unable to seek outside medical care should also be provided with appropriate PPE.

Additionally, we are concerned about workers most frequently exposed to diseases and who work in close physical proximity to others or in public spaces, including fast food, janitorial, retail, airport, and transportation settings. Please consider measures to ensure these workers have adequate protections and supplies to do their jobs safely.

**Full Wage Support for All Working People**

Thank you for quickly expanding Unemployment Insurance (UI) eligibility to workers unemployed or who have reduced hours due to the pandemic, and for clarifying eligibility requirements around actively seeking work and eliminating impacts on employers' experience ratings.

Many workers, especially those with lower incomes, will struggle to make it with only a partial wage replacement. We urge you to consider increasing payments to full wage replacement and extend UI benefits for an additional 26 weeks.

We also ask the state provide relief for workers who are misclassified as independent contractors, have no paid sick days, benefits from their employer, or are ineligible for UI.

### **Paychecks for Hourly School District Workers**

Public schools play a complicated and crucial role in the smooth functioning of every community in our state. The recent decision to close schools for students will give classroom educators and administrators time to figure how to provide vital services, including food, mental health services and other student supports in the event of schools staying closed to staff and students for weeks or months this spring.

Minnesota educators are problem solvers and community leaders. They are doing everything possible to keep students, colleagues, and themselves safe. They will do their part in our communities as we face this unprecedented situation. It's what they do every day.

While Minnesota's educators are doing their part for our students, we are asking you to do yours for the people schools depend on and pass SF4369/HF4415 which requires districts to pay hourly workers if school buildings are closed. This pandemic has reminded us how much we depend on each other, whether we're white, black, Latino, Asian, Native American or newcomers. It would be unfair to force hourly school workers, who are more likely to be people of color, to lose their paychecks while school buildings are closed. School districts receive the same state funding during this crisis and can afford to pay hourly workers. Only by standing united with all Minnesotans can our state ensure everyone's well-being through this anxious time.

### **Emergency Paid Time Off**

As this crisis grows, an increasing number of workers are being asked to work remotely or are forced to miss work for pandemic-related reasons. Poor communities of color and other marginalized communities are the driving force in our state's economy. They will face the brunt of this crisis, as most of low-wage jobs cannot be done remotely and poverty wages do not allow for families to establish emergency savings.

In order to ensure that our workers & communities can pay for food, medical needs and other basic needs, we are calling on the State of Minnesota to enact a policy for 15 days (3 weeks) of Emergency Paid Time Off paid for by employers and provided to all workers, no exceptions, who have to miss work (including retroactively covering days that have already been lost) due to the coronavirus pandemic for any reason, be it for a temporary job shut down, personally getting sick, caring for kids when schools shut down, or any other related reason. The 15 days should be in addition to whatever benefits workers already have in their workplace.

To avoid impacting small businesses for 15 days off, we are calling on the state to implement a separate tax on the largest businesses in the state including Amazon, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo, Target, Ecolab and others, and small to medium sized businesses can apply for a tax credit equal to 100% of the paid sick leave benefit they have paid out. If workers have to miss more than 15 days for any reason related to the crisis, they should be able to access unemployment insurance benefits immediately without counting the benefit against the employer's experience rating, and with a moratorium on employer challenges during the pandemic.

### **Bonding**

We encourage you to finish the 2020 Minnesota Legislative session strong by focusing on investing in Minnesota's people and projects. A bonding bill that meets Minnesota's infrastructure needs can be the economic stimulus needed to jump start an economy headed for

likely recession, after the worst of the coronavirus impacts have passed. Funding needed asset preservation, public building construction projects, local economic development, and safe roads, bridges, and transit systems will better serve Minnesota communities and businesses and help get goods to market and put Minnesotans to work during the prime construction season.

### **Maintain Labor Standards through the Crisis**

Emergencies shouldn't be an excuse to relax labor standards. Do not allow rollback of any labor rights or protections, including but not limited to:

- Wage theft law
- Child labor laws
- Tip penalty
- Preemption
- Prevailing wage - ensure that local wage rates established under Minnesota's prevailing wage laws apply to any construction projects funded or financed in whole or in part with taxpayer dollars.
- Occupational licensure standards – protect

Thank you for your continued leadership and all you do for working Minnesotans. We stand ready to assist you and your administration in any way we can.

Sincerely,



William McCarthy  
President



Bradley Lehto  
Secretary-Treasurer

CC:

Rep. Melissa Hortman, Speaker of the House  
Sen. Paul Gazelka, Senate Majority Leader  
Rep. Kurt Daudt, House Minority Leader  
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