

Emergency Economic Relief Actions for Colorado from Impacts of COVID-19

Executive Summary: As our country braces for the impacts of COVID-19, Colorado will soon feel the one-two punch of the costs of a large-scale public health emergency response effort and deep economic shutdown. First responders are facing impossible challenges and choices, countless small businesses will be forced to close their doors, and without paid family leave, job security, and affordable health care and housing, countless families who were already struggling to make ends meet are heading toward catastrophe. By working together and taking commonsense actions now, we can flatten the curve and keep the economy working. Workers, first responders, and small businesses in our state need the state to act.

The state and Governor Polis have taken crucial steps to slow the spread of the virus and ensure the health and safety of our communities. At the same time, bold, immediate action is needed to protect working families across Colorado from the imminent economic harms and fall-out arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to make sure that -- during this deep economic downturn -- families can keep food on their tables, and meet other basic needs.

We are asking Governor Polis, the Emergency Economic Advisory Council, and Colorado Lawmakers to consider emergency measures in the following six areas:

Paid Sick Days and Emergency Paid Family and Medical Leave

No worker, regardless of their status, should be worried about losing their job if they need to take time to care for themselves or a family member because of COVID-19. Congress recently passed legislation to extend sick leave to more workers nationwide. However, that legislation allows for exemptions based on business size -- potentially leaving millions of Colorado workers without coverage when they get sick or are quarantined. Colorado should lead the way and close the loopholes to immediately ensure all workers are covered regardless of the industry or size of business they work for. Illness isn't the only thing threatening to put a strain on Coloradans and their families. The closure of public schools, businesses, and limits on public gatherings will put massive pressure on working people to provide care for family members. Coloradans should be allowed to take leave if they are caring for someone with the disease, caring for someone who is at-risk or quarantined, or caring for children.

Health Care

For many Coloradans -- whether they are infected or not -- COVID-19 could be a catastrophic event in their life because of barriers to access and the cost of healthcare. To keep our communities healthy and reduce the virus' spread, we cannot have cost and access to doctors appointments, prescriptions, testing, and other timely health care services be a barrier for Coloradans to seek treatment. The state must keep as many people insured as possible, streamline the application process and increase staff to meet rapidly growing demand for state health care programs and enrollment, and ensure that the cost of COVID-19 treatment is free or low cost to all Coloradans regardless of immigration status.

Economic Security for Impacted Workers

We need to ensure that workers negatively impacted by COVID-19 can broadly and easily access benefits to support themselves through unemployment insurance, food assistance, and other supportive programs. The state must do everything in its power to support workers who have lost their jobs, had their hours reduced, or are unable to work because of illness, quarantine, lack of childcare, or unsafe working conditions. Supports need to be provided to all workers regardless of status or whether their employers call them an independent contractor or an employee. Not only do benefits need to be expanded, but we need to streamline the application process, increase staff to meet rapidly growing demand for benefits, and put steps in place to ensure working Coloradans can start to recover once the country pulls through this and the economy starts to recover.

Housing Protection

Now is not the time for Coloradans to have to worry about losing their housing or having their utilities turned off. The state should mandate a moratorium on all evictions, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs for as long as needed and all interest and late fees on housing and utility payments should be suspended.

Workplace Health and Safety

Working people across the state, including people on the front lines of our healthcare system, grocery, and airport workers, face an increased risk of exposure to illness. Many of these workers have a dual responsibility for their patients, customers, and clients, as well as themselves and their families. The state must ensure that employers are complying with prevention and containment best practices and that all frontline workers receive training and have the proper equipment for their roles to prevent the spread of the virus and stay healthy. All employers -- not just those in critical industries -- must have contingency plans should people see their workplaces closed or their hours scaled back if this health emergency grows.

Worker Voice

At a time when many working Coloradans are risking their own well-being to protect our health, care for our loved ones, and keep us safe, housed, and fed, they must be able to raise their voices together for what they need to keep themselves and others safe. Labor-management relationships are an important vehicle for ensuring that employees have the tools, supplies, training, and working conditions to do their jobs well and safely. All workers deserve the freedom to organize together so they can have the collective voice and the ability to navigate critical situations such as this one.

This platform was developed with support from:

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Abolish ICE Denver
AFT Colorado
AFSCME Council 18
BCTGM Local 26
Bell Policy Center
BlueGreen Alliance
Cobalt
Coloradans for the Common Good
Colorado AFL-CIO
Colorado Building & Construction Trades Council
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Colorado Education Association
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Colorado Springs Area Labor Council
Colorado WINS Local 1876
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