



A Union of Professionals

AFT Top 'Asks' from Congress on COVID-19

The spread of COVID-19, caused by the new coronavirus, is an unprecedented, cataclysmic event. Since this crisis began, the AFT has been fixated like a laser on three things:

- The health and safety of our members, communities and students;
- The health and safety of first responders, nurses and healthcare workers who are on the frontline; and
- The economic health of our country, both long and short term. We need to start with getting money directly into the pockets of Americans struggling to put food on the table, facing job losses and worried about their families.

Finance a sizable amount of household consumption.

Individuals who see their incomes drop because of job loss or a decline in hours worked will *cut spending* even on necessities like food and housing. Providing support will help people maintain this spending, which will boost the economy.

- Maximize income supports that can be delivered through existing programs, including federal-government-financed expansions to food stamps and Medicaid.
- Provide an extension and expansion of unemployment insurance (UI) benefits.
- Cover the entire cost of COVID-19 treatment for every individual who contracts it.
- Send payments directly to U.S. families. The first payment of \$2,000 per adult and child, phased out for higher-income taxpayers, should be immediate. Future payments would be stepped down over time and tied to economic triggers.

Give substantial fiscal aid to state governments.

State governments will bear a large share of the cost of the public health response to the coronavirus. Further, due to job loss and sharp declines in spending, state tax revenues will fall.

- Pay states' share of Medicaid. The federal government should take on all state Medicaid spending for at least the next year.
- Using the ARRA model, establish a state fiscal stabilization fund for K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, increase emergency funding for Title 1, community schools, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Head Start, and public colleges and universities.
- Provide support for infrastructure as well as for cleaning and school remediation.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Provide a payroll tax credit to businesses so they will not lay off workers.

- Institute payroll tax credits, starting at the end of the first quarter, for coronavirus-impacted businesses that maintain, or nearly maintain, payroll.

Ramp up direct government purchases of things that help fight the virus.

- The federal government should significantly increase its purchase of medical equipment for use in fighting the impact of the coronavirus, and finance field hospitals and testing clinics to address the crisis.

All measures to address the coronavirus shock should automatically continue while conditions warrant it.

- All measures to fight the coronavirus should automatically continue until the economy no longer needs them.

Make paid sick leave a basic mandated labor standard.

- Paid sick leave has been shown to significantly reduce the spread of disease—this is a major benefit.

Pass the Supporting Students in Response to Coronavirus Act, introduced by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.) which provides vital funding for programs to help schools plan for closures, including:

- Funding for distributing meals, and accessible technology making sure education services for students can be continued;
- Funding to clean and sanitize educational facilities, train educators and staff on how to ensure buildings are safe for students' return, and coordinate with local health departments;
- Funding for college students in need of food, housing and child care;
- Relief for college students for paying back student aid for disrupted terms; and
- Increased funding for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network to address stress and mental health needs.

Protect the nation's healthcare workers by providing funding for:

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration enforcement accompanied by a stronger temporary OSHA standard to protect frontline workers;
- A hotline for healthcare workers to call to receive information about the needs of frontline workers to keep themselves and their patients safe, as well as to receive information about the adequacy and condition of equipment released from the stockpile supplies.
- Health and safety personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers (including incentives for companies developing safety equipment, such as N95 masks and respirators, and support for subindustries, such as the manufacturers of ventilators or medical supplies);

- Child care for healthcare, first responders and other frontline workers, including using schools as child care centers so that these individuals do not have to miss work because schools are closed;
- Training on COVID-19 response in all healthcare settings;
- Increasing the number of patient care beds to provide surge capacity; and
- Funding and relevant legislative language should be included to respond to immediate surge based on staffing needs and to address workplace violence, safe patient handling, safe staffing levels, loan forgiveness and non-exploitative international recruitment.

Help America’s college student loan borrowers through debt cancellation by supporting the efforts of Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) to:

- Have the government make—not suspend—monthly loan payments by paying down loans for borrowers each month.
- Place a moratorium on wage garnishment, Social Security offset, and tax refund offset.
- Codify the administration’s initiative to suspend interest on student loans.
- Ensure that government-funded monthly payments count toward Public Service Loan Forgiveness and income-driven repayment forgiveness.

Help break the digital divide by:

- Urging the Federal Communications Commission chair to make use of emergency powers to temporarily waive relevant E-rate program rules to ensure that all K-12 students have adequate home internet connectivity if their schools close.

Make it easier to vote in federal elections:

- The Vote By Mail Act would allow every registered voter to receive a ballot in the mail.
- The federal government, through the Postal Service, would assist states with the costs of mailing ballots to registered voters.
- States can keep their current polling practices if they wish, but those states that choose a full vote-by-mail system will see their election costs significantly drop.

Provide mortgage and credit relief and other help for renters:

- Federal housing regulators should enact moratoriums on foreclosures on all properties secured by a mortgage backed or insured by them. This should apply to foreclosures already in process and the eviction of homeowners or residents in properties secured by a federally backed or insured mortgage.
- Prevent negative credit reporting.
- Place a moratorium on evicting renters who fall behind in their rent payments.

Utilize and strengthen Medicaid:

- Provide additional funding for the Federal Medical Assistance Percentages: FMAP is what the federal government pays states for a specified percentage of program expenditures. States must ensure they can fund their share of Medicaid expenditures for the care and services available under their state plan; and in this emergency, more is needed.
- Suspend waiting periods for immigrant children and pregnant women.
- Suspend action on the new Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Regulation that would make changes to what funding states can use for the state share of Medicaid funding and for supplemental payments to providers

Suspend federal executive orders related to collective bargaining rights of federal workers:

- These orders hinder employees' ability to work cooperatively with agency managers to figure out how to carry out their responsibilities in ways that don't endanger federal workers and members of the public with whom they interact.