



Letter to Kentucky's Congressional Delegation on Behalf of the ThriveKY Coalition: Expand COVID-19 Health Measures, Consumer Protections, and Economic Relief

Senator Mitch McConnell
Senator Rand Paul
Congressman Brett Guthrie
Congressman Thomas Massie
Congressman Hal Rogers
Congressman John Yarmuth

Congressman Andy Barr
Congressman James Comer

April 29, 2020

Senators McConnell, Paul and Representatives Barr, Comer, Guthrie, Massie, Rogers, Yarmuth:

Thank you for the actions you have taken to sustain our commonwealth through the COVID-19 pandemic. Swift passage by Congress of the Families First Coronavirus Act and the CARES Act were critical steps in supporting state and local efforts to contain COVID-19 and helping Kentucky families, providers, and small businesses cope with the pandemic's health and financial impact. As this crisis continues, it is clear that much more needs to be done to protect Kentuckians and to ensure a full economic recovery.

COVID-19 has created a public health emergency far greater than any we have seen in generations, affecting families across the commonwealth, from every Congressional district, from every region, and from every socio-economic level.

In just one month, nearly 500,000 Kentuckians have filed for unemployment insurance, roughly a fifth of our workforce, and our rate of uninsured has doubled. As Kentuckians lose work and income because of social distancing practices that are saving lives, the struggle to keep food on the table, pay for needed medications and make rent is deepening for many families.

This pandemic has highlighted weaknesses in Kentucky's safety-net that have been ignored for far too long. Our public health workforce has been shrinking for more than a decade. In the last two years, new policies in SNAP have cut 30,000 Kentuckians and their families out of needed benefits. People with drug felonies who have served their sentences – up to 23 years ago – continue to be banned from SNAP.

Before this pandemic hit, there were already 223,000 Kentuckians living and working without health insurance. Since the state of emergency began, an estimated 228,300 more have lost their jobs along with their employer-sponsored health insurance. Add to this the fact that no state or federal laws exist requiring employers to provide paid leave, and it's clear that we are all at greater risk during a health crisis.

COVID-19 has also exposed deep inequities embedded in our health care system, disproportionately affecting Kentuckians of color who make up about 12.4% of our population, while accounting for 24.7% of the positive coronavirus cases and 21.3% of the deaths that have been reported, according to data published by the Governor's office on April 27th.

Access to high-quality health care and the ability to obtain testing and treatment should not depend on your ZIP code, the color of your skin, the language you speak, the work you do, or the size of your bank account. Viruses don't discriminate along these lines.

This pandemic reminds us that we all benefit when our friends, families, neighbors, and coworkers are healthy. Every Kentuckian deserves access to affordable health care and workplace policies that don't force us to choose between paying the bills and spreading a communicable disease.

As Congress takes action to advance "phase 4" legislation responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the undersigned organizations strongly urge you to build on past bipartisan efforts to advance legislation that will continue to protect Kentuckians from the health and economic fallout of COVID-19 as efforts are made to "re-open" our economy by ensuring equitable access to care and extending additional relief to individuals, families and safety-net providers. More is also needed to equip states with sufficient financial support and testing capacity to combat the crisis until the economy has fully recovered. This package should:

- Provide large, flexible assistance to states and local governments (including those with populations under 500,000) to help make up for the significant decline in public revenue.
- Raise the temporary federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) rate for Medicaid from 6.2% to 12.4% to help states absorb the economic impact of this crisis and to prevent deep state budget cuts to other critical services.
- Include Medicaid expansion in the temporary FMAP increase.
- Eliminate the ban on SNAP benefits for people with former drug felonies and help struggling families keep food on the table by increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by 15%.
- Prioritize funding for larger direct payments to individuals and families and create a TANF emergency fund to assist low-income Kentuckians in meeting their basic needs.
- Boost emergency assistance to expand homeless Kentuckians' access to shelter.
- Provide rental assistance to prevent mass evictions and increased homelessness.
- Guarantee paid sick leave for all working Kentuckians and safe working conditions for essential workers.
- Boost funding for child care assistance to the families of essential workers.
- Increase funding for child welfare programs to prevent abuse and neglect as families are sequestered at home, experiencing extraordinary levels of uncertainty and economic stress.
- Invest in a sustainable public health infrastructure for this and future outbreaks, with emergency supplemental funding to support state testing, monitoring, and reporting.
- Require standardized COVID-19 data collection and reporting by race, ethnicity, sex and language to track inequities across states, regions, cities and towns.
- Bolster funding for safety-net providers, including Federally Qualified Health Centers and Rural Health Clinics, serving those hit hardest by the pandemic such as communities of color and those in rural areas.
- Invest in consumer assistance to help Kentuckians access affordable care, navigate the healthcare system, enroll in benefits, and connect with social supports.
- Open and strengthen the individual health insurance market to the uninsured by providing enhanced premium tax credits and COBRA subsidies.
- Enact comprehensive consumer protections from surprise medical bills and predatory debt collection.

Again, thank you for your continued leadership during this crisis. This pandemic has affected every person in America, from every walk of life. A robust safety net can help us all stay healthy and safe and create the right conditions to support economic recovery.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Kentucky
Advocacy Action Network
Benedictines for Peace
Bridgehaven, Inc.
Carter Psychotherapy Services, DBA
Central Kentucky Council for Peace & Justice
Northern KY Environment Committee
Coalition for the Homeless

Communicare Inc.
Community Action Kentucky (NKCAC)
Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C)
Community Farm Alliance
Courier Publishing Company
Deer Park Family Doctors
Fairness Campaign
Fairview Community Health Center
Family & Children's Place

Family Circle, Inc.
Feeding Kentucky
Forward Kentucky
Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky
Freestore Foodbank
Healthy Reentry Coalition of Kentucky
Home of the Innocents
Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky
Jefferson County Teachers Association
Jewish Family & Career Services of Louisville
Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
Kentucky Association for School Social Work
Kentucky Center for Economic Policy
Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Kentucky Coalition for Healthy Communities
Kentucky Council of Churches
Kentucky Council on Problem Gambling, Inc.
(KYCPG)
Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Kentucky Nonprofit Network, Inc.
Kentucky Primary Care Association
Kentucky Psychological Association
Kentucky Rural Health Association
Kentucky State AFL-CIO
Kentucky Voices for Health
Louisville Branch of National Action Network
Matthew25 AIDS Services
Metro United Way
MHA Kentucky
Mission Behind Bars and Beyond (MB3)
Mountain Comprehensive Care Center, Inc.
NAMI Kentucky
NAMI Lexington
NAMI Louisville
National Association of Social Workers - Kentucky
Chapter
Nelson County Democratic Woman's Club
Northern KY Justice and Peace Committee
Olive Branch Ministries
Phoenix Global Humanitarian Foundation
Quaker Committee on Kentucky Legislation
Seven Counties Services
Sign of the Times
Square One, LLC
The Arc of Kentucky
The Church of Christ, Union (Union Church, Berea)
ThriveKY Coalition
Wellspring Kentucky
Westview Tax Services

ThriveKY Steering Committee

Advocacy Action Network | Feeding Kentucky | Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky
Kentucky Center for Economic Policy | Kentucky Council of Churches | Kentucky Equal Justice
Center | Kentuckians for the Commonwealth | Kentucky Voices for Health
Mental Health America of Kentucky