

PRESS RELEASE

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Contacts:

Todd Cherkis, todd@unitedworkers.org

Marceline White, marceline@marylandconsumers.org, (410) 624-8980

Zafar Shah, shahz@publicjustice.org, (410) 625-9409 x 237

100+ Local Civic Organizations and Businesses Call on Maryland Leaders:

Take these 10 Measures to Protect Residents during the COVID-19 Emergency

Over 100 civic organizations and businesses throughout Maryland have endorsed a 10-point list of demands for action by Gov. Larry Hogan, local executive officials, and the Maryland court system to prevent economic fallout during the COVID-19 State of Emergency. Local farms, labor unions, healthcare advocates, legal services organizations, and more have coalesced around these demands.

The measures detailed in this letter represent the wide array of Maryland constituents that will be dramatically affected by reduced work hours, loss of employment, quarantine measures, and unavailability of medicine and medical treatment.

10 Measures to Protect Residents during the COVID-19 Emergency

1. Prevent loss of housing	2. Ensure essential services
3. Remove barriers to unemployment benefits and public benefits	4. Support low-income Marylanders to self-quarantine through sick leave expansion and other common sense supports
5. Ensure the safety of Maryland's incarcerated and halt new immigrant detentions	6. Support essential workers
7. Stop debt collection activities by public and anchor institutions	8. Provide tests and quarantine options for people experiencing homelessness
9. Assist Maryland students	10. Increase access to food and medicine

These demands are detailed below. The list of signing organizations will be updated and available at <https://forms.gle/arjQUqUu2MngZvru8>

Call to Action: 10 Measures Maryland Leaders Must Take to Protect Residents during the COVID-19 Emergency

March 13, 2020

We, the undersigned organizations, demand immediate actions by the Governor, County Executives and the Mayor of Baltimore City, and the Maryland Judiciary to protect vulnerable Marylanders from economic harms that we are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For workers, consumers, people with disabilities, renters, homeowners, students, elders, small business owners, and others, the State of Emergency proclaimed by the Governor and the record number of travel and event cancelations means not just uncertainty about individual health, but also an indefinite period of income loss and financial peril. State leaders need to answer the question, What will happen when families cannot pay for food, rent, mortgages, and medicine? Adequate preparedness requires an effective safety net for vulnerable populations. To meet this emergency, State leaders must change “business as usual” in Maryland’s administrative and judicial systems. The actions that we demand will prevent compounding economic, social, and medical harms that would otherwise result from this emergency - harms which would fall heaviest on low-income communities and on communities of color.

We call on State leaders to utilize executive and judicial powers to take the following measures during the State of Emergency so that Maryland residents can weather this very difficult period.

1. Prevent loss of housing

The Maryland Judiciary should stop accepting new filings of actions for eviction, mortgage foreclosure, and tax sale foreclosure and also stay proceedings in existing actions for the duration of the Emergency. Because so many residents will be unable to appear in court to contest newly docketed cases, prohibiting filings is the critical preventative step to avoid default judgments. There are nearly 13,000 eviction actions filed every week in Maryland, a staggering figure that stands to increase during the State of Emergency unless new filings are prohibited.

(The Judiciary announced after publication of this letter that courts are closed to the general public until April 3, but certain types of legal cases will continue. Evictions and foreclosures were not included in the list. It remains unclear whether courts will accept new filings during the closure.)

Sale of tax liens should temporarily stop while families are unable to access essential services or experience loss of income. Residents have limited ability to pay off liens and remove their properties from tax sale. In Baltimore City, there are 15,523 properties on the list for liens that will be sold in May. Residents should have more time to resolve outstanding liens in light of the State of Emergency.

Local sheriffs should halt evictions during the Emergency, i.e. enforcement of existing judgments for possession, warrants of restitution, and writs of possession. The Sheriffs of

Baltimore City, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County have already announced 2-week moratoriums on evictions. Maryland needs a statewide moratorium that spans the duration of the Emergency and covers both landlord-tenant evictions and evictions resulting from foreclosures.

Additionally:

- Use State and Local Affordable Housing Trust funds for eviction prevention.
- Prohibit nursing home discharges, except where necessary for the health of the resident.
- Assist students who have lost housing due to university closures, including the costs of immediate relocation and storage of belongings.

2. Ensure essential services

All utility companies (water, gas and electricity) should broaden the eligibility criteria for affordability programs and repayment plans to accommodate both short- and long-term loss of income.

Utility companies should also prohibit cut-off of services to residential properties. Baltimore Gas and Electric has announced suspension of late fees and cut-offs until May 2020. All of the region's utility companies, including water companies, should follow suit and prepare to extend cut-off moratoriums if necessary to protect residents' access to essential services during and after the Emergency.

3. Remove barriers to unemployment benefits and public benefits

Unemployment Compensation

Count all work earnings, including most recent, to establish eligibility

Prohibit termination of benefits for "able, available, and actively seeking" work requirements

Extend benefits from 26 to 30 weeks, temporarily

Waive the waiting period to receive benefits

Needs-Based Cash/In-Kind Assistance

Place a moratorium on reductions, terminations, and collections of overpayments for needs-based assistance, such as Temporary Cash Assistance (TANF), Food Stamps

(SNAP) Temporary Disability Assistance (TDAP) including recoupment relative to the TDAP and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Suspend or postpone all redeterminations and extend eligibility periods for those whose eligibility periods are ending in the next few months.

Place a moratorium on all work activity or job search requirements for the TANF and SNAP programs.

Health Care

Place a moratorium on Medical Assistance terminations or suspensions. Additionally, extend eligibility for Medicaid.

Other Public Assistance

Ensure that colleges and universities continue to honor work-study contracts with students during the time campuses are closed.

Ensuring that students on the university health insurance plan can transfer to a private provider at home.

4. Support low-income Marylanders to self-quarantine through sick leave expansion and other common sense supports

Employees covered by the Healthy Working Families Act (HWFA), Maryland's earned sick leave law, must be able to use their earned leave where they cannot work due to school closures, business closure, or because they or a family member has been quarantined by a public health official.

Coverage under the HWFA should extend to all temporary workers. All workers whose jobs require significant public contact and those working with vulnerable populations must be immediately covered.

Waiting period to use sick leave under the HWFA should be eliminated, and the maximum number of days employees can use leave should be extended to 14 days.

The Department of Human Services should assist households that cannot afford to purchase 14-day supplies of food, medicine, and other household goods necessary for self-quarantine.

5. Ensure the safety of Maryland's incarcerated and halt new immigrant detentions

The Governor and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services should use creative and safe emergency measures to reduce prison overcrowding and to drop medical co-pays for prisoners who need medical care.

Maryland must increase supplies in prison and jails that make handwashing easier and that allow for use of hand sanitizers.

Additionally, it is urgent now that the Sheriffs of Frederick and Worcester and the Correction Director in Howard County reduce the number of prisoners in ICE detention for minor infractions. These officials should refuse to accept ICE detainees, not only to reduce crowding but particularly because detention centers have closed off visitation and blocked immigrant detainees' access to counsel.

6. Support essential workers

The Governor and the Department of Health must extend the Medical Assistance program to cover workers in the child care, homecare, healthcare, and public transit industries who are currently without health care insurance coverage or third-party payment assistance.

7. Stop debt collection activities by public and anchor institutions

Suspend all debt collection efforts by public agencies and call on Anchor Institutions, particularly "non-profit" hospitals, to do the same.

The Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) should cease all driver's license suspension, wage garnishment, and punitive enforcement practices for nonpayment of child support.

The Central Collection Unit (CCU) should cease collections for the next two (2) months.

8. Provide tests and quarantine options for people experiencing homelessness

We must make testing and quarantine options for people experiencing homelessness accessible. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Providing free and on-demand covid-19 tests available at community health centers and health departments;
- Creating safe locations for quarantining people experiencing homelessness;

- Providing a cohesive communications plan for community health providers to refer patients experiencing homelessness to more in-depth procedures and quarantine spaces.

9. Assist Maryland students

The Governor should increase food stamp allotments for those families where children will temporarily not be receiving free and reduced cost meals during the period that public schools are closed. Baltimore City has announced that schools will operate an emergency food service program. A statewide program will be needed.

Colleges and universities should offer loaner laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots for students who lack access to a computer or Wi-Fi at home.

Universities should also provide housing options for students displaced by school closures and campus shutdowns.

10. Increase access to food, medicine, and testing

- Provide support for local food banks and pantries. Provide food delivery services for citizens who are under quarantine.
- Provide medicine and medical services delivered to low income residents.
- Provide medical support for residents under quarantine. Conduct check-ins to ensure the safety of vulnerable people.
- Ensure that there will be no immigration-status checks and no ICE involvement in COVID-19-related testing or treatment.

We urge State leaders to coordinate and to tackle these steps aggressively across all jurisdictions. A patchwork of local and incomplete measures will be ineffective and unfair to our communities.

Maryland would not be the first government to mobilize emergency measures to protect their residents. Across the United States, many other local governments are implementing changes including many of those listed above to protect their citizens. Some of these include the governments of Philadelphia, San Jose, and San Francisco. The governments Los Angeles, New York City, New York State, Miami, and Washington, D.C. are all considering what levels of protection they will implement.

Signing Organizations (11:09 AM, 3/16/2020)

ACLU of Maryland

Advocates for Children and Youth

American Friends Service Committee Friend of a Friend Program

B'More Clubhouse

Baltimore Asian Resistance in Solidarity

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition

Baltimore Psychedelic Society

Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition

Bearfoot Farm

BMore Awesome Inc

Bmore-POWER

CASA

CASH Campaign of Maryland

Catholic Community of St. Anthony of Padua, St. Dominic & Most Precious Blood

Center for Urban Families

Centro de Apoyo Familiar

Charm City Care Connection

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Chinese American Network for Diversity and Opportunity

Circles of Voices

Coalition for a Humane Hopkins

Coalition for the Advancement of Financial Education Montgomery MD

Communities United

Community Allies of Rainbow Youth (CARY)

Community Development Network of MD

Community Outreach and Development, Community Development Corporation

Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Maryland and Delaware, Inc.

Creative Alliance

Disability Rights Maryland

Echotopia LLC

Equity4HC (Howard County)

Fair Development Roundtable

Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland

Farm Alliance of Baltimore

Farmworker Justice

Food & Water Action

Friends of Latin America

Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America

Hidden Harvest Farm

Hinenu: The Baltimore Justice Shtiebl

Homeless Persons Representation Project

Housing Our Neighbors

Human Resources Development Commission of Allegany County

IMAGE Center for People with Disabilities

Immigration Outreach Service Center

Institute for Energy and Environmental Research

Jews United for Justice

Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor & the Working Poor, Georgetown University

Latino Providers Network, Inc.

Latino Racial Justice Circle

LifeStyles of Maryland Foundation, Inc.

Local Management Board of Allegany County, Inc.

Loyola University Maryland Outreach and Advocacy

Maryland Alliance for the Poor

Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Maryland Hunger Solutions

Maryland Legislative Coalition

Maryland Nonprofits

Maryland Peace Action

Maryland Prisoners' Rights Organization

Maryland State Medical Association (MEDCHI)

Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service

Mommy Up

Montgomery County Renters Alliance, Inc.

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Maryland

National Employment Law Project

National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore

Nuclear Information and Resource Service

Nurses for Justice

Open Justice Baltimore

Organizing Black

Our Revolution Maryland

Peer Wellness and Recovery Services

Popular Resistance

Prevent Nuclear War - Maryland

Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland

Progressive Montgomery

Public Justice Center

Renters United Maryland

Right to Housing Alliance

Runners4Justice

SEIU Local 500

SEIU32BJ

Sex Workers Outreach Project Baltimore City

Showing Up for Racial Justice - Baltimore

Showing Up for Racial Justice - Montgomery County, MD

Social Work Community Outreach Service (SWCOS), University of Maryland School of Social Work

Solidarity Maryland

South Baltimore Community Land Trust

Southeast Community Development Corporation

St. Gabriel Catholic Church-Windsor Mill

St. Mary's Outreach Center

St. Vincent de Paul Social Action Committee

Sunrise Movement Baltimore

Takoma Park Mobilization

Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee

The Pluralism Project

Towson University Student Government Association

UNITE HERE Local 7

United Workers

Whitelock Community Farms

Yellow House Farm

York Road Partnership

Young Socialist Movement