July XX, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell Majority Leader

U.S. Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Speaker

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer

Democratic Leader

U.S. Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy

Minority Leader

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

As you work to craft the next COVID-19 relief package, the undersigned organizations request that it include the Pandemic TANF Assistance Act, so families can access flexible emergency assistance to cover groceries, utility bills, rent, and other basic necessities. As organizations that work with and advocate for families and children who struggle to meet basic needs, including families and children of color being hit hardest by the pandemic, and who face systemic racial disparities, we see or hear about people with little income struggling to make ends meet every day. Even before the pandemic, millions of families and children were struggling to get by. No family or child in the wealthiest nation on earth should live in poverty, but unfortunately, millions do.

Thirty-eight million people – including nearly 12 million children – were living in poverty in 2018, with children of color bearing the brunt of those numbers. In 2019, the Federal Reserve found that 40 percent of adults could not cover a $400 emergency, underscoring the need for greater access to regular cash assistance. Our families live the reality of these inequities— which are exacerbated by systemic racism in policy and decades of disinvestment in communities of color—every day. They face extreme hardships that have only been amplified by this crisis and are getting worse.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey,55 percent of households with a child under the age of 18 had at least one adult lose employment income since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Racial disparities in job and income losses are hitting Black and Latinx families particularly hard, with more than half of these households reporting losses, and few reporting emergency funds that could [last more than three months](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/04/21/about-half-of-lower-income-americans-report-household-job-or-wage-loss-due-to-covid-19/). [Nearly four in 10 Black and Latinx households with children](https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/reports/ipr-rapid-research-reports-pulse-hh-data-9-july-2020-by-race-ethnicity.pdf) reported not having enough food to eat, experiencing food insecurity at twice the rate of white households with children. 11.8 million children live in households that [missed a mortgage or a rent payment in May](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/06/the-risks-children-face-during-pandemic.html?utm_campaign=20200701msacos1ccstors&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery), with those numbers even worse for Black and Latinx families. Native American households are also [facing disproportionately high rates of COVID-19](https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/SafeHousingPartnerships-FlexFundingFAQ-Jan2019.pdf) and are much more likely to experience poverty and live in areas of concentrated poverty.

To fight back against these growing racial and economic inequities, Congress must include an emergency grant program to help low-income families and children, especially children of color. The Pandemic TANF Assistance Act (S. 3672), introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden (OR), would do just that. S. 3672 would create a new $10 billion Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant Program that would provide essential funding for states, territories, and tribes to address the unmet needs of families and individuals living at 200 percent or below the federal poverty line (FPL). Including families with children at 200 percent of the FPL is critical to addressing the lack of consistent access to nutritious food, stable housing, healthcare, and other vital resources needed to support their healthy development, but often are not included in other federal programs. Near-poor families with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the FPL [experience material hardship](file:///C:\Users\emehrabi\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\GQOQVMIX\l) at nearly the same rate of families living below the poverty line, which underscores the need for the Pandemic TANF Assistance Act. The Coronavirus Emergency Assistance Grant Program would also provide flexible emergency funds that could be used to provide eligible families with short-term cash, non-cash, and in-kind assistance to address their basic needs, or for subsidized employment at the appropriate time that is safe and consistent with public health guidance.

Importantly, this fund would allow states to provide emergency cash assistance to families and individuals that have been left out of other relief measures like unemployment insurance (UI), including individuals returning from jail or prison and survivors of domestic violence, and young people from low-income neighborhoods just entering the labor market, among others[.  What’s more, ample research shows](https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/SafeHousingPartnerships-FlexFundingFAQ-Jan2019.pdf) that emergency funds can help survivors of domestic violence find and maintain safe housing. Limited savings, more extended periods of joblessness, higher food and utility costs have stretched families’ already-limited budgets to the breaking point, leaving many unable to pay rent and without enough food to eat.  Emergency cash assistance and in-kind support is an essential tool to help children and families get by and prevent a potential spike of poverty during this pandemic. Access to cash assistance is especially [critical for Black families who are more likely to live in states](https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/cash-assistance-should-reach-millions-more-families) with extremely low benefits and minimal access to them.

For families who are living in poverty or living one risk away from falling into poverty, these funds could prevent a downward spiral that would create even more significant economic and financial hardship. Evidence shows providing households with resources enables families to support their children’s healthy development and future success. The funds from this bill would help avoid evictions, homelessness, foreclosure, and utility cut-offs; prevent children from being removed from their homes; provide resources for families to buy necessities like food, diapers, and personal hygiene supplies; and prevent the mental and physical health issues that accompany extreme stress.

We urge Congress to demonstrate their commitment to addressing systemic poverty and racial disparities by including the Pandemic TANF Assistance Act in the next COVID-19 legislative package. The emergency grant program included in this bill would help families and children, especially families of color, meet their basic needs and is an essential part of more significant action and assistance needed for our most vulnerable. Thank you for being a champion for families and children who are living in poverty and whose needs are too often forgotten during times of crisis.

Sincerely,

National Organizations (insert names)