

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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MEMORANDUM

June 5, 2020

To: Members of the Committee on Oversight and Reform

Fr: Committee Staff

Re: Hearing on “No Worker Left Behind: Supporting Essential Workers”

On **Wednesday, June 10, 2020, at 12:00 p.m. E.T.**, the Committee will hold a remote hearing to examine the health and economic burdens shouldered by essential workers during the coronavirus pandemic. One proposal that will be examined is H.R. 6909, the Pandemic Heroes Compensation Act of 2020, which would create a new program for essential workers who have been injured or impacted by the coronavirus crisis.

I. BACKGROUND

Essential workers are risking their lives to provide critical services to their communities during the coronavirus pandemic. This includes first responders, transit workers, healthcare workers, grocery store clerks, custodians, and delivery workers, as well as many federal, state, local, and tribal employees.

Many essential workers are at higher risk of contracting coronavirus than non-essential workers.¹ According to estimates by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as of June 2, 2020, more than 67,600 health care professionals had tested positive for coronavirus, causing more than 330 deaths.² At least 68 grocery store workers died from coronavirus, and more than 10,000 grocery store workers were infected or exposed as of May 20, 2020.³ More than 150 transportation workers died of coronavirus as of May 27, 2020.⁴

In many cases, essential workers are not able to afford financial setbacks from medical

¹ *The Workers Who Face the Greatest Coronavirus Risk*, New York Times (Mar. 15, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/15/business/economy/coronavirus-worker-risk.html).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Cases in the U.S.* (June 3, 2020) (online at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html).

³ United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, *In National Coronavirus Press Conference, America’s Largest Food & Retail Calls on Top Supermarket Companies to Reinstate Hazard Pay* (May 20, 2020) (online at www.ufcw.org/2020/05/20/pressconference/).

⁴ Amalgamated Transit Union, *As States Reopen, Transit Worker Death Toll Reaches Grim Benchmark* (May 27, 2020) (online at www.atu.org/media/releases/as-states-reopen-transit-worker-death-toll-reaches-grim-benchmark).

costs and work interruptions, and many make below the national median wage.⁵

The coronavirus crisis is having a disparate impact on communities of color. About 38% of African American workers are employed in essential industries, but only about 27% of white workers are employed in essential industries.⁶ Last week, Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms told the Select Committee on the Coronavirus Crisis that “more than 80% of those hospitalized by COVID-19 in Georgia were African American.”⁷

H.R. 6909, the Pandemic Heroes Compensation Act of 2020, is modeled after the successful September 11th Victims Compensation Fund and was introduced by Chairwoman Maloney, House Committee on the Judiciary Chairman Jerrold Nadler, and Rep. Peter T. King on May 15, 2020. The legislation would establish a compensation fund for essential workers who are required to work outside of their homes and become ill or die as a result of coronavirus.

II. WITNESSES

John A. Costa

International President, Amalgamated Transit Union

Anthony “Marc” Perrone

International President, United Food & Commercial Workers International Union

Bonnie Castillo

Executive Director, National Nurses United,
California Nurses Association, & National Nurses Organizing Committee

Eneida Becote

Wife of Edward Becote, essential worker who died from coronavirus

Clint Odom

Senior Vice President for Policy and Advocacy
Executive Director, Washington Bureau
National Urban League

Staff contacts: Peter Kenny, Christina Parisi, Jordan Blumenthal, and Max Whitcomb at (202) 225-5051.

⁵ *How to Protect Essential Workers During COVID-19*, The Brookings Institution (Mar. 31, 2020) (online at www.brookings.edu/research/how-to-protect-essential-workers-during-covid-19/).

⁶ *The Coronavirus Burden is Falling Heavily on Black Americans. Why?*, The Guardian (Apr. 15, 2020) (online at www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/16/black-workers-coronavirus-covid-19).

⁷ Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Briefing on Supporting America’s Cities: What Mayors Need to Safely Reopen* (May 29, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/news/press-releases/coronavirus-panel-hold-member-briefing-mayors-urgent-need-more-federal-support>).