

April 2, 2020

President Commissioner Julie Wheeler and County Commissioners
County Board of Commissioners
York County
28 E Market Street,
York, PA 17401

Dear President Commissioner Wheeler, County Commissioners:

We, the undersigned organizations, call on the York County government to adopt the following actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our organizations represent thousands of working families across the state and we are profoundly concerned for the families that are most vulnerable during this time. Workers across the county have put their lives on the line during this outbreak, risking their own health and safety to keep us healthy, care for and feed our children, keep health and other critical businesses clean, and much more. Our government has a responsibility to them and to all in our county and state to ensure that every possible effort is taken to keep them and their families safe.

In light of the uncertainty and rapidly-changing nature of this pandemic, we strongly recommend the County government prioritize expanding healthcare access to all affected by the pandemic, provide emergency relief funds, and reduce incarceration. While the federal and state government are taking actions there are many needs that are not met and need to be addressed by local leadership.

Our organizations call on you to utilize your power to build on that initial action immediately by taking these steps to ensure that the most vulnerable and high-risk communities are cared for and that risk to all is minimized.

Expansion of Healthcare Access

With the layoffs occurring as a response to the COVID-19 virus, many families with work-based health insurance are now uninsured. Black, brown and low-income communities are most vulnerable to this crisis. We strongly recommend the following actions:

- Ensure that all COVID-19 testing and treatments are free and readily available to everyone regardless of insurance status, language, race, country of origin or immigration status.
- Provide free reliable and multilingual telecommunication tools for residents to access local doctors and medical professionals.
- Guarantee that there will be no immigration status check and no ICE involvement in COVID-19 related testing or treatment.
- Create emergency funding to be provided to the County's Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) to expand hours and slots, and permit the health centers to purchase

additional Personal Protection and other equipment. FQHCs are in the best position to provide culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate health access but they need upfront grants to expand access immediately.

- Create an emergency childcare fund to ensure the children of first responders, doctors, nurses, and other health care workers and workers providing essential services for the community are cared for during the crisis.

Expand Protections to Workers

The federal government recently vastly expanded paid sick and family leave to require private employers to provide paid leave to their workforces impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. However significant holes remain in the coverage, requiring local action.

- Ensure that all County employees or contractors that are unable to telework must be granted “Emergency Leave” and continue to be paid their regular salary when schools/government agencies are shut down.
- Ensure that essential employees or contractors of the county are provided with the appropriate protective equipment.
- Implement a moratorium on debt collections for nonpayment of fines and fees, including but not limited to, fines and fees related to traffic violations, child support payments, restitution, etc.
- Demand the State to clarify that employers are prohibited from taking disciplinary action against workers who utilize sick time or leave due to COVID-19 related issues.
- Demand that the State expand the new federal paid sick leave to include employers of over 500 and under 50.
- Demand that the state condition receipt of any COVID-19 assistance to businesses that have retained staff salary obligations throughout the crisis.

Ensure Safety of Incarcerated Individuals

The danger to incarcerated individuals of spreading disease is well-documented.¹ We are requesting that the County:

- Place a moratorium on accepting ICE detainees
- Reduce unnecessary arrests to shrink the detention center population.
- Ensure non-custodial arrest processing to the maximum extent possible.
- Ensure non-criminalization and non-militarized enforcement of shutdown/shelter-in-place regulations.
- Incorporate robust medical analysis including COVID-19 testing and safety education centered in the intake process.
- Provide a complete waiver of medical co-pays and personal hygiene supply costs.
- Perform an individualized assessment of current detainees and all individuals detained during the State of Emergency, and release all inmates where appropriate.

¹ <https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/45/8/1047/344842>

Creation of a Relief Fund for Impacted Residents and Small Businesses

The federal government has established some relief funds to support small businesses and families. Unfortunately, many low wage residents will not be able to access these funds because of immigration restrictions or they are otherwise ineligible for the specific benefit programs being augmented. In the immediate term, some families are protected by the freeze on evictions and collections, but as soon as those processes are reopened, poor families are going to be confronted with huge amounts of bills that they simply will not immediately be able to pay.

We ask that the County establish an emergency fund to assist residents with payments critical to health, housing, and work connectivity (car payments, cellphone, internet). The County needs to be prepared for a deep financial commitment; even after residents are able to return to work, it will take poor residents months or even years to recoup their lost earnings. If the County's most vulnerable residents face economic ruin stemming from a public health crisis beyond their control, it will have dramatic negative effects on the County. Drastic intervention is necessary immediately to ensure that this doesn't happen.

The actions listed above are critical and essential to our collective efforts to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. If these steps are not taken with the utmost urgency, we could see York County contribute to the dramatic rise in deaths from this pandemic and exacerbate the rapidly increasing inequality we see in our county, state and country. The most vulnerable community members in York County are depending on you. Please act without hesitation and take whatever action necessary to ensure the safety of all, regardless of race, immigration status, country of origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability; including the vital steps outlined above.

Please contact Thais Carrero at tcarrero@wearecasa.org with any questions or follow-up regarding these recommendations.

CASA
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The Movement
Union Evangelical Lutheran Church
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York
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