



Reverend Al Sharpton, President & Founder  
Reverend Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson, Chairman

National Action Network, Inc.

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May 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Congressional Leaders,

We, the undersigned, call upon the U.S. Congress to ensure that state and local governments have the resources they need to help communities rise from the ashes of this terrible pandemic that has taken more than 65,000 American lives to date.

The Conference of National Black Churches (CNBC) and independent churches represented in this statement comprise a combined membership of more than 25 million people and more than 30,000 congregations.

The civil rights organizations represented are working tirelessly to empower and protect our communities – and to ensure that response to the coronavirus pandemic is consistent with the values of racial and economic justice.

As faith and civil rights leaders, we know that America cannot re-open without strong public services – everything from garbage collection to water treatment to road maintenance – that keep our communities running safely and smoothly.

We are troubled by the reluctance of some elected leaders in Washington to step up for America's communities in the same way they have for big banks and corporations. During this unprecedented moment of challenge and crisis, Main Street clearly needs the same consideration as Wall Street. And we are appalled by the impact this callous disregard for public services will have on people of color.

The coronavirus has inflicted a brutal toll on the African-American community. According to the Centers for Disease Control, African-Americans constitute 20% of all U.S. coronavirus deaths, although we are only 12% of the U.S. population. The economic harm that communities of color will suffer, if the federal government fails to act, will also be devastating.

State and local governments were facing enormous pressures well *before* this public health and economic crisis began. During the Great Recession more than a decade ago, stern austerity measures stifled investment in our communities, imposing budget cuts from which states and localities never recovered.

And now, with the economy faltering and the tax base crumbling, state and local governments are in such fiscal distress that they are beginning to lay off and furlough public service workers, at exactly the moment when we need them most. A pink slip is no way to thank our everyday heroes – but that is exactly what will happen unless Congress moves quickly to invest enough aid to fix the problem.

We urge Congress to remember that, for decades, the public sector has been one of the nation’s most dependable employers of African-Americans, lifting generations of black families into the middle class.

Furthermore, support for public services should not be used as a bargaining chip to allow corporations to escape liability and accountability during this pandemic. When the Majority Leader of the United States Senate casually says we should let states go bankrupt or that he will not provide support for state and local governments without also providing a liability shield for corporations, that is a slap in the face to the hardworking public sector employees – from nurses to corrections officers to school custodians – who are putting their lives on the line to keep their neighbors safe. In the meantime, he always finds money to bail out the ultra-wealthy, never telling the CEOs to tighten their belts or do more with less. In fact, the coronavirus relief bill passed in late March contains what the *New York Times* calls “a small change to tax policy [that] could hand \$170 billion in tax savings to real estate tycoons.”

If we have learned anything from the extraordinary hardship of the past three months, it is that protecting America’s communities requires a sturdy public service infrastructure and robust support for the men and women on the front lines of this pandemic. This is no time to abandon public service workers. This is a moment to fund the front lines.

Sincerely,

Reverend Al Sharpton, President  
National Action Network

Senior Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson  
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Reverend W. Franklyn Richardson,  
Conference of National Black Churches

Chairman Senior Bishop George E. Battle, Jr.  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Senior Bishop Lawrence L. Reddick, III  
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

Derrick Johnson, President and CEO  
National Association for the Advancement  
of Colored People

Presiding Bishop Charles E. Blake, Sr.  
Church of God In Christ

Marc Morial, President & CEO  
National Urban League

Dr. Samuel C. Tolbert, Jr., President  
National Baptist Convention of America,  
International, Inc

Melanie Campbell, President and CEO  
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation &  
Convener of the Black Women’s Roundtable  
Public Policy Network

Vanita Gupta, President and CEO  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and  
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Kristen Clarke, President & Executive Director  
National Lawyers' Committee for  
Civil Rights Under Law

Dr. Jerry Young, President  
National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc.

Dr. Timothy Stewart, President  
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.