

Protecting Civil & Human Rights During COVID-19 Public Health Crisis

Dear Governor Lamont,

We, the undersigned forty-three organizations, work with and for Connecticut's residents who are underserved and marginalized. Together, we serve and/or represent tens of thousands of people in the state. In the past week, many of us sent you communications asking you to act now to protect our communities from the health consequences and collateral fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We remain deeply concerned that the State of Connecticut's response to COVID-19 is leaving behind Connecticut most disproportionately impacted residents. These include people who are incarcerated and their loved ones, low-income workers, undocumented and documented immigrants, people who are homeless or housing insecure, people with disabilities, youth in and at risk of being ensnared in the justice system, people in policed communities, people without health insurance, people in psychiatric facilities, people who are food insecure, and people without paid sick days and paid family and medical leave.

Our state is only as healthy as its most vulnerable person. Right now, the state's responses to COVID-19 may leave our most disproportionately impacted residents unprotected. Collectively, we ask you to take immediate actions to protect people's health, safety, and rights in the following areas:

- **Elderly and people with disabilities & people in in-patient facilities**
 - The state's response must ensure the legal rights of people in in-patient psychiatric facilities, residential care and nursing homes, and facing forced medication or confinement proceedings. It must also protect the health and safety of at-home personal care attendants and their disabled clients. For more information, please reference conversations between DMHAS and the [Connecticut Legal Rights Project](#).
- **Frontline workers**
 - The state's response must include action for frontline workers, particularly low wage nursing home and retail employees as well as child care workers, who are exposing themselves to higher risk and being forced to work irregular hours - many struggling with childcare at the same time - to deal with an unprecedented and surging consumer demand for household goods and care. The state must ensure that nursing home, retail employees (personal care, food and dry goods), and child care workers receive hazard pay, which is equal to 1.5X an employee's regular rate of pay; access to posted schedules at least fourteen days in advance; predictability pay for reduced hours that occur within the three day notice period at a rate equal to one half an employee's regular rate of pay for each scheduled work hour that is cut; right to rest period of 11 hours between shifts; right to decline unscheduled hours without fear of retaliation; and a right to request a flexible working arrangement to accommodate familial responsibilities. For more information, please contact [SEIU 32BJ](#) and [CT Working Families](#).
- **Immigrants**

- The state's response must include action to demand the federal government release all Connecticut residents being held in immigration detention outside of the state; healthcare and hygiene access for those who remain detained; hospitals and healthcare centers being declared deportation-free zones; moratoriums on location monitoring/ICE check-ins in Hartford. More information from the letter from [CT Bail Fund](#).
- **Low-income workers and workers without paid sick days and paid leave**
 - The state's response must include protections for service employees and other low-income workers who are at risk of facing layoffs, reductions in hours and wages, and viral exposure. For more information, see the letters you have received from the SEIU, including [SEIU 1199 New England](#).
 - Connecticut must fill in remaining gaps between state and federal law to ensure all workers take the time they need to care and recover without a missed paycheck. The state must provide paid sick leave to all workers, regardless of the size of their employer, and those who need to care for their chosen family and children of any age. The state should also provide 100% wage replacement to all workers taking paid leave, which is critical to workers who cannot afford to miss even a portion of their earnings. For more information, contact [SEIU 32BJ](#) or see the op-ed by the [Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund \(CWEALF\)](#).
- **Homeless and housing insecure**
 - The state must have leadership and protocols in place for COVID-19 interagency response for homeless with medical respite care and access to testing, provide increased rental assistance, expand shelter space and unsheltered outreach, and increase support for staffing. More information from the letter from [Partnership for Strong Communities Reaching Home](#) campaign.
 - The state should extend the existing moratorium on evictions and foreclosures well beyond its current expiration date of March 27 and be comprehensive (e.g. a stay of all cases in progress, postponement of foreclosures, and suspension of all executions/ejectments, for the duration of the public health emergency and continuing until at least 30 days after). The state should also take action to make sure that massive evictions do not occur at the time the moratorium expires. In regard to subsidized housing, the state should make sure that its own state agencies, as well as public housing authorities, adapt their rules to provide immediate relief to residents faced with income loss as a result of the crisis. The state must also establish a fund to help people in need pay their rent or mortgage. For additional detail on the need for housing reform see the [letter from seven housing advocacy organizations](#) and the [letter from five legal services organizations](#); both letters' signatories include the Partnership for Strong Communities, Connecticut Fair Housing Center, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Connecticut Legal Services, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, and others.
- **Incarcerated or in policed communities**
 - The state's response must include action for decarceration; preventing lockdowns and solitary confinement; and providing meaningful access to healthcare, hygiene supplies, and free phone calls for all people who remain incarcerated. In addition, any state de-incarceration plans must include immediate housing for people reentering society. For more information, [see the](#)

- [three letters](#) you received from the ACLU of Connecticut, Katal Center, and a group of more than 23 organizations and nearly 400 individuals.
- The state's response for youth who are incarcerated must include action for decarceration; preventing lockdowns and solitary confinement; access to healthcare, hygiene supplies, schooling, and free phone calls. We are concerned by reports of curfews that could endanger youth, and of youth being denied access to lawyers in detention. For more information, see the letters you have received from the [Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance](#), [Center for Children's Advocacy](#), and Office of the Child Advocate.
 - The state's responses must include appropriate arrest moratoriums, as jailing places people in danger of confinement in close proximity to others and, in turn, risks viral exposure and spread. The state should make clear that any arrest-based enforcement of things like quarantines or curfews are unwelcome, as these would be counterproductive to public health and safety. See the letter from the [ACLU of Connecticut](#).
- **Financially insecure people who need income supports**
 - Temporarily suspend re-determination or termination of eligibility for all federally reimbursed assistance programs during the emergency and seek all appropriate waivers from the federal government under Section 1135 of the Social Security Act, etc. to ensure ongoing federal reimbursement to Connecticut. This will ensure that there is no interruption of critical medical, food or other needs and that interruptions in the state's workforce and ability to process applications will not disrupt benefits. Provide good-cause exemptions for the SNAP work requirements and time limits. Remind caseworkers to boost SNAP promptly when households report reduced hours of work, and to act on reported changes right away. Request that Congress provide emergency SNAP assistance or other direct monetary assistance to households with children who would otherwise receive free or reduced-priced meals if not for their schools being closed due to the COVID-19 emergency. More information from [CT Voices for Children](#).
 - Waive Care4Kids income eligibility for healthcare workers, first responders and others deemed essential during the state of emergency. More information from the [CT Early Childhood Alliance](#).
 - **People who can become pregnant**
 - The state's measures to mitigate spread of COVID-19 are crucial, but we must be aware & address the impacts they will have on access to sexual and reproductive health care. All executive orders relating to shutdowns that include exceptions about essential healthcare also specifically include providers of time-sensitive reproductive healthcare including abortion care, particularly if there are travel restrictions. More information from [NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut](#).
 - **Uninsured people**
 - HUSKY Health, the state's public health coverage program for low-income children and families, should be expanded to all income eligible families, including undocumented children and parents. For more information, see the [op-ed from the Center for Children's Advocacy](#).
 - Waive copays and coinsurance for COVID-19 testing and related visits. Connecticut should require all insurers regulated by the state to cover COVID-19 testing and related treatment at 100%, without coinsurance, copays or

deductibles. This is critical to ensuring that cost concerns do not become a barrier to testing or treatment. More information from CT Voices for Children.

- Utilize contingency funds to provide outreach, education and testing to people who are most likely to be affected by COVID-19, including those in homeless shelters and Connecticut residents who visit food pantries and senior centers. More information from CT Voices for Children.
- **Youth**
 - The State Department of Education should plan now for a full summer school schedule for all students who need to enroll. While online learning is a viable option for many, 14 percent of Connecticut households do not have internet access, and many may not have home computer access at all, making it virtually impossible for many low-income students to engage in meaningful online learning when attendance at brick and mortar schools is not an option. For more information, see the [op-ed from the Center for Children's Advocacy](#). We are also calling on SDE to work with local school districts to continually provide specific and consistent special education services to children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). SDE guidance to districts should address the special circumstances facing children with special needs during a lengthy school shut down.

In addition, we request **transparency regarding membership of the state's emergency response teams** and **daily, public briefings** regarding the state's emergency response plans for disproportionately impacted residents.

People who are at risk of falling through the cracks in the state's COVID-19 response are most often impacted in many ways – they are service workers who are also immigrants, incarcerated people who are disabled, homeless people living in highly policed areas, and people at the intersections of all areas mentioned above. While we have listed these action areas discreetly, they are intersectional. We recognize that the state's failure to act in one would mean harm in another.

Our collective call for you to act underscores the need for the State of Connecticut to take seriously all of these considerations or risk a COVID-19 response that increases the vast inequities already in our state. Each of our organizations would welcome working with you and your administration in crafting a COVID-19 response that ensures public health, safety, and rights for everyone. We also encourage you as the state or in your demands of the federal government include stimulus support for nonprofits serving the most underserved and marginalized in our state every day.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Connecticut
Aurora Women and Girls Foundation
Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC)
Center for Leadership and Justice
Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
Community Renewal Team
Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Connecticut Fair Housing Center

Connecticut Legal Services
Connecticut Voices for Children
Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
Connecticut Working Families
CSEA SEIU Local 2001
CSU-AAUP
CT Black Women
CT Citizen Action Group
CT Cross Disability lifespan Alliance
Every Woman Connecticut
Gardner's House Inc
Girls For Technology
Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Hartford GYN Center
Immanuel Congregational Church
Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice
LiveGirl
Middletown Works
Moral Monday CT
NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut
New Haven Legal Assistance Association
New Haven Peoples Center
Open Communities Alliance
Partnership for Strong Communities
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in CT
R kids Family Center
RACCE
Random Hacks of Kindness Junior
SEIU 32BJ
Southern New England Conference United Church of Christ
The Connecticut Women's Consortium
The CT Maternal and Child Health Coalition
The Narrative Project
United Auto Workers Region 9A
Women and Girls Funds Task Force of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut
YWCA Hartford Region

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