

YOUNG INVINCIBLES

June 23, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

On behalf of Young Invincibles (YI), a national organization dedicated to amplifying the voice of young adults and expanding their economic opportunity, I write to express our strong support for the below policy recommendations in any upcoming legislative stimulus package to combat the effects of Covid-19.

Over the last three months, Congress has infused trillions of dollars into our economy to support small businesses, frontline workers, and young people. According to new research, despite the devastating effects of record unemployment claims, these efforts mitigated the rise in poverty many people feared.¹ But much more is needed. Insufficient congressional policy responses to the Great Recession unnecessarily prolonged suffering and stunted economic growth. Today, our nation is facing extreme levels of unemployment -- with youth unemployment at a record high of 25%.² Absent federal action, after July 31, 2020, rental evictions will force many to the curb and unemployment payments will cease. Tens of millions of households, including young people, will be forced off a fiscal cliff without relief.

The effects of Covid-19 on loss of life, families, small businesses, and the overall economy are devastating, but they have most acutely affected communities marginalized by race and income level. Recent data show that while Black Americans represent 13% of the U.S. population, 24% of Covid-19 deaths have been of Black Americans.³ An analysis supported by the National Bureau of Economic Research showed more than 40% of Black business owners and 32% of Latino business owners were put out of work in April, compared to 17% of White business owners.⁴ Lost wages for students and borrowers

¹ Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, “The CARES Act and Poverty in the COVID-19 Crisis,” June 21, 2020. Retrieved from

<https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/coronavirus-cares-act-forecasting-poverty-estimates>.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” June 22, 2020. Retrieved from <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14024887>.

³ Pew Research Center, “Black Americans Face Higher COVID-19 Risks, are More Hesitant to Trust Medical Scientists, Get Vaccinated,” June 4, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/04/black-americans-face-higher-covid-19-risks-are-more-hesitant-to-trust-medical-scientists-get-vaccinated/>.

⁴ R. W. Fairlie, “The Impact of Covid-19 on Small Business Owners: Evidence of Early-Stage Losses from the April 2020 Current Population Survey,” June 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27309.pdf>.

put out of work may also further exacerbate the student debt crisis that already affects Black and Latino borrowers at higher rates than Asian American and White borrowers. Diminished earnings runs the risk of deepening long-standing cycles of depressed wages and wealth accumulation while disproportionately increasing the likelihood of student loan default among Black and Latino Americans.⁵

In April, YI released a [5-Point Plan](#) to protect young people in a recession along with our policy [recommendations](#) for the HEROES Act. With the House of Representatives recently passed HEROES Act, Young Invincibles is eager to continue efforts to expand economic opportunities for 18-34 year olds, and we encourage the Senate to swiftly act to enact the following provisions:

Higher Education

- **Include all students and borrowers in relief provisions.** The CARES Act left out millions of borrowers from repayment suspension, and the Education Department (ED) has muddled implementation while foreclosing emergency assistance to millions of students. Upcoming legislation should explicitly prevent ED from further efforts to withhold emergency assistance based on Title IV eligibility. Congress should also expand loan repayment suspension to include borrowers of older federally-backed loans (FFEL) and, to the extent practicable under law, private student loan borrowers. Recent analysis has noted some states have entered into agreements with private lenders to this effect, but the effects of the pandemic span across states of residency. Where Congress must appropriate just compensation to loan providers and servicers, it should do so.⁶ Any direct cash assistance program must also include full-time students who were left out of CARES.
- **Reduce outstanding loan balances.** The HEROES Act provides debt cancellation up to \$10,000 for “economically distressed borrowers.” This is a welcome first step, but continues to exclude millions of student borrowers. Including the Student Loan Debt Relief Act (S. 2235) will bring peace of mind to millions of struggling families and help stimulate the economy by opening resources in the long term for young people to invest in homes, build wealth, and start small businesses that create jobs.
- **Direct funding to stabilize the child care sector, especially for student parents.** Child care was a burdensome cost for many working families before the pandemic, and recent analysis indicates that as many as 4.5 million child care spots could be lost as a result of center closures resulting from economic strain.⁷ Although the CARES Act provided funds to support child care for essential workers in the early days of the pandemic, the long-term implications for child care

⁵ B. Miller, “The Continued Student Loan Crisis for Black Borrowers,” Center for American Progress, December 2019. Retrieved from

<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/11/26071357/Student-Debt-BRIEF.pdf>.

⁶ Congressional Research Service, “Proposals to Extend CARES Act Provisions to Federal Student Loans Not Held by the Department of Education: Frequently Asked Questions,” June 10, 2020. Retrieved from

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46409>.

⁷ Center for American Progress, “Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots,” April 24, 2020. Retrieved from

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2020/04/24/483817/coronavirus-pandemic-lead-permanent-loss-nearly-4-5-million-child-care-slots/>.

and working families require significant investment to provide stability for both providers and the families they serve. This investment will be a critical need for student parents, who represent nearly one in four college students nationally.

- **Foreground wellbeing of students, faculty, and staff.** As institutions move toward reopening campuses as early as late summer, we caution against expansion of institutional liability protections. As noted in a letter from more than 30 organizations that we joined to the House Education & Labor and Judiciary committees, “Students depend on schools to make responsible decisions that protect the health and safety of their campuses and communities. Students lack the power to dictate the terms on which colleges will demand a return to academic life, potentially forcing students to choose between pursuing a higher education and staying safe.” In this context, “Students' and workers' access to justice offers a critical counterweight to the economic pressure that may drive colleges to reopen too quickly and hastily, without proper attention to health and safety.”⁸
- **Direct ED to set parameters for institutional equity and accountability in disbursement of student funds that align with those proposed by the Postsecondary Data Collaborative.** In May, YI joined 18 other organizations in calling on Secretary DeVos to require detailed reports accounting for institutional use of CARES Act funding. Data reports should be disaggregated to indicate at least details on funds allocated by:⁹
 - Pell Grant receipt
 - Undergraduate / Graduate student status
 - Race/ethnicity
 - Full- / part-time status
 - First-time / transfer status
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Dependency status

Codifying reporting expectations will ensure accountability for equitable use of funds, while also providing needed data to inform policies related to this or future crises.

Health Care

- **Increase the federal share of state Medicaid expenditures (FMAP),** with the extent and duration of the increase tied to state-specific economic indicators. The HEROES Act includes a 14% increase in FMAP funding, which we strongly encourage the Senate to include. However, the duration of the increase should be extended beyond the one-year timeline included in the House bill, as the need is expected to last much longer, and should be tied to indicators of economic recovery.

⁸ Americans for Financial Reform & Student Borrower Protection Center, Letter to Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, Chairman Scott, and Ranking Member Foxx, June 8, 2020.

⁹ Postsecondary Data Collaborative, Letter to Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, May 12, 2020. Retrieved from http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/postsecdata/docs/resources/postsecdata_cares_act_guidance_final_0.pdf.

- **Create a 60-day special enrollment period (SAP) for the 38 HealthCare.Gov states** so that all remaining uninsured people can access coverage. HealthCare.Gov should be immediately opened to allow everyone the ability to get covered. Funding for outreach and enrollment activities is also critical to ensure the uninsured population know about their options and have the resources to get covered. Materials should be culturally competent, targeted to key populations, and provided in multiple languages and access formats.
- **Incent states to expand Medicaid.** Restore the Medicaid expansion federal match to 100% for the 14 states that have not yet expanded their Medicaid programs. Given the likelihood of a severe economic downturn, the number of uninsured and amount of uncompensated care will increase, further exacerbating pressure on an already strained health care system.
- **Require all COVID-related treatment to be covered without cost-sharing.** Even for those who are insured, many consumers will avoid seeking care for fear of cost. Insurers should be required to cover COVID treatment as well as testing without cost-sharing to ensure that those who need treatment do not avoid it.
- **Protect patients by ending surprise billing in all health care settings, including air and ground ambulances.** Ending surprise billing practices out right will not only help patients who may need treatment for Covid-19 and fear an unexpected cost, but millions more who are at risk of unaffordable medical bills.
- **Provide for additional protections from medical debt.** Providers and collection agencies should not seek to collect any debt related to Covid-19 testing and treatment, and be prohibited from reporting any such debt to credit bureaus. Other medical debt accrued until the state of emergency ends should be subject to additional consumer protections, including a prohibition on collections, reporting to credit bureaus, or other extraordinary actions for at least six months.
- **Make health coverage more affordable.** Millions of people are facing reduced hours, layoffs, and steep cuts to their income. By expanding ACA subsidies beyond 400% FPL for all Marketplace enrollees, Congress can both increase coverage rates and reduce premiums, putting more money back in people's pockets.
- **Require data collection and reporting to address disparities and support equitable testing and treatment.** This pandemic will magnify and further reinforce persistent health inequities. HHS should be required to collect and report comprehensive demographic data on race, ethnicity, primary language, and geographic location for all diagnosed cases of and deaths due to Covid-19, as well as testing for and treatment of the virus. It is critical to ensure that uninsured non-United States citizens, who are not eligible for the ACA marketplace or Medicaid, are able to access free Covid-19 testing and treatment.
- **Allow DACA recipients to enroll in ACA coverage with tax credits.** The health and economic effects of Covid-19 do not discriminate based on immigration status, and our federal assistance should not either.

Food and Housing Assistance Programs

- **Ensure that SNAP work requirements are suspended for all public programs,** including student work requirements. Although the CARES Act allows some flexibility regarding participation and application requirements, the federal agencies that administer public benefit

programs were not given the option to eliminate the work requirements other than for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents in SNAP. Congress should not leave this action to federal agencies or require states to request waivers, thereby creating more work for federal agency workers.

- **Increase the base-level SNAP benefit by 15%.** Despite the expanded SNAP funding in the CARES Act, we believe the legislation missed a critical opportunity to serve the dual function of stimulating the economy and feeding hungry low-income young people by increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by 15% and increasing the minimum benefit to \$30.
- **Relax provisions on summer SNAP for students.** Students intending to continue their education in the fall may feel pressure to leave school to remain eligible for SNAP throughout the summer. SNAP availability for students in the summer could be temporarily expanded by using eligibility criteria outlined in the proposed College Student Hunger Act of 2019.
- **Extend moratorium for all renters.** As this pandemic goes on, up to 15 million renter households could need payment assistance to remain stably housed.¹⁰ With the CARES Act eviction protections set to expire on July 31, 2020, hundreds of thousands of young people will be ill equipped to cover their rents. The Senate must extend the moratorium length to one year.

Broadband Infrastructure

- **Invest in broadband access and infrastructure.** Abrupt college closures have necessitated rapid expansion in online course offerings for college students. However, millions of households lack access to broadband internet required for effective, extended online learning. Further, data show broadband access rates among the homes of Black and Latino students trail those of White students.¹¹ Facing the prospective need for continued online learning in alignment with social distancing requirements, as well as recognizing the long-term realities of teaching, learning, and the economy, Congress must invest in broadband capability and student technology access. The [*Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act*](#) provides \$1 billion to colleges and universities to pay for at-home internet connections for students in need. Congress should also add Pell grant eligibility to the list of qualifications for emergency Lifeline program assistance for low-income Americans to access broadband internet.

Elections and Voting

- **Strengthen voting resources to college students** by including the Help Students Vote Act. This measure would:

¹⁰ S. Stochak, A. Shroyer, J. H. Choi, K. Reynolds, & L. Goodman, "How Much Assistance Is Needed to Support Renters through the COVID-19 Crisis?," The Urban Institute, June 15, 2020. Retrieved from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102389/how-much-assistance-is-needed-to-support-renters_0_0.pdf.

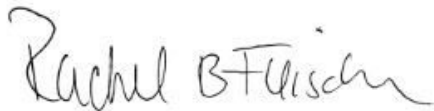
¹¹ Brookings Institution, "As classes move online during COVID-19, what are disconnected students to do?," March 20, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/20/as-classes-move-online-during-covid-19-what-are-disconnected-students-to-do/>.

- Direct colleges to designate a campus administrator as Campus Vote Coordinator as the identified source for students with questions about voter registration.
- Ensure the campus is consistently communicating with students about registration deadlines and upcoming elections, and that voter registration forms are easily accessible.
- Allow public and private institutions of higher education to apply for federal grants to expand nonpartisan student voter engagement efforts.

Challenges effectively administering elections in primary elections across the country over recent months only make more urgent the need to ensure every eligible voter's ability to exercise their right to vote, both in this fall's election and beyond. The HSVA should be one part of a comprehensive effort to safeguard this right.

We look forward to continuing our work with your leadership offices during this crisis for the health and wellbeing of people of all ages, as well as for our economy and our democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel B. Fleischer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Rachel Fleischer
Executive Director