

YOUNG INVINCIBLES

November 16, 2020

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

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

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

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

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 urge House and Senate leadership to take seriously the need to pass a robust relief package that addresses the most urgent issues facing young people.

With the 2020 elections behind us, voters sent a clear message that they expect their elected leaders to focus on policies addressing Covid-19, the economy, and health care. Over the eight months since Congress passed the CARES Act, millions of young people have fallen through the cracks of the country's public health and economic response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The temporary relief measures have mitigated hardship, but significant gaps and implementation challenges have delayed aid to some households, even as these measures are soon set to expire. Now is not the time for political or partisan games. We are seeing a surge in Covid cases, with the United States surpassing 10 million confirmed cases, at a time when long term unemployment is stifling economic growth. To support young people across the nation as we continue to confront the pandemic and economic hardship resulting from it, Congress must move to enact meaningful measures addressing health care access, economic safety net programs, and student debt relief.

Health Care

- Expand the Medicaid expansion federal match to 100% for the 14 states that have not yet expanded their Medicaid programs. Given the continued economic downturn, the number of uninsured and uncompensated care will increase, further exacerbating an already strained health care system.

- Increase the federal share of state Medicaid expenditures (FMAP), with the extent and duration of the increase tied to state-specific economic indicators.
- Protect patients by ending surprise billing in all health care settings, including air and ground ambulances. Ending surprise billing practices 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.
- 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.

Economic Safety Net Programs

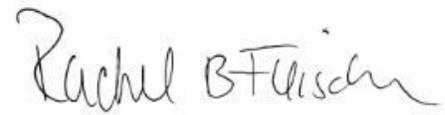
- Ensure that SNAP work requirements are suspended for all public programs, including student work requirements. While the CARES Act does allow for some flexibility regarding participation and application requirements, the federal agencies that administer public benefit programs were not given the option 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.
- Expand Earned Income Tax Credit for low income workers not raising children. Workers under age 25 are now ineligible for the EITC if they are not raising children. Including the HEROES Act's provision lowering the eligibility age to 19 (excluding full-time students) would directly benefit approximately 4.8 million young workers. Expanding the EITC for workers not raising children would especially benefit workers of color: 3.8 million of those who would benefit, or 1 in 4, are Latinx; 2.9 million of those who would benefit, or nearly 1 in 5, are Black.

Higher Education

- Reduce outstanding loan balances by including broad student debt cancellation. State funding levels of public institutions in many states never returned to their pre-Great Recession levels. Institutions, in turn, have placed a greater share of the cost of higher education on students and their families, exacerbating what has become a \$1.7 trillion student loan debt burden. The CARES Act suspended required loan payments through September 30, 2020--a pause extended through the end of 2020 by presidential directive. However, with pervasive uncertainty about future economic and workforce conditions, potentially tens of millions of workers may still lose their jobs, and the already crisis-level burden of student loan debt endangers young people's financial stability. Broad cancellation of student debt would provide direct relief to millions of borrowers. This legislation 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.
- Provide student loan repayment forbearance across all loan types. While the CARES Act suspended student loan repayment of publicly-held debt, an estimated 9 million borrowers were still left out of the CARES Act forbearance period. While there are reports of some private lenders extending forbearance options, borrowers should have access to a hold-harmless repayment suspension period, regardless of loan type, including a freeze on interest accrual. Student loan borrowers with commercially-held Federal Family Education Loan Program debt and debt held by institutions through the Perkins loan program should have equal treatment to borrowers with federal loans covered by CARES repayment forbearance over the coming months.
- Defer student loan payments for 2020 and 2021 college graduates. With the unemployment rate for 20-24 year-olds reaching historic highs, lawmakers must include recent and soon-to-be college graduates entering the labor force. Given the moment in time when the COVID-19 Graduate Relief Act was introduced, we urge Congress to consider loan deferment to any student who graduated college during the 2021 calendar year. Graduates usually have six-months of grace period before their payments resume, so without some measure, May 2021 graduates will be facing payments by Fall.
- Broadband access and infrastructure. Abrupt college closures necessitated rapid expansion in online course offerings for college students. However, millions of households still 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](#). Facing the 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 should include a significant investment in broadband for underserved rural and urban communities and narrow equity gaps for students forced online by the coronavirus pandemic.

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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel B. Fleischer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rachel Fleischer
Executive Director