



BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
CONSTRUYENDO COMUNIDADES SALUDABLES
SOUTH KERN - SIUR DE KERN

Visión y Compromiso™



April 14, 2020

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni G. Atkins
Senate President pro Tempore
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Holly J. Mitchell
Chair, Senate Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 5080
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker of the Assembly
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Philip C. Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 94249

**Re: Urgent COVID-19 Needs in the San Joaquin and Eastern
Coachella Valleys**

Dear Governor Newsom, Senate Pro Tempore Toni Atkins, Speaker Anthony Rendon, Senator Holly Mitchell, and Assemblymember Phil Ting,

Thank you for your leadership to curb and respond to COVID-19 impacts directly. We write in partnership with and on behalf of San Joaquin and East Coachella Valley communities to share immediate priorities and urgent needs. COVID-19 is hitting low-income communities, undocumented individuals and families, and communities of color in disproportionate and staggering ways, with repercussions far into the future if emergency action is not taken to mitigate these impacts. We must work together to align local, state and federal policy and investments in unprecedented ways to confront health, environmental, and economic injustices faced by inland California residents.

We look forward to working with the legislature to further develop an investment strategy and complementary policies that ensures inclusion of all Californians in our recovery and eliminates the inequality in health access, in the environment, and in economic opportunity that has plagued our state for so long and is playing out in the current crisis. As a first step in mitigating and overcoming the impacts on lower income inland Californian households and neighborhoods through this crisis, we urge you to take swift and decisive action on community priorities identified below.

Establish Disaster Response Fund to Support Economic Security of all Californians and all Communities

- Provide immediate, direct cash assistance for workers and families who are excluded from the federal CARES Act aid due to the social security number and tax filing requirements of the federal rebate checks and ensuring that those who are undocumented and those who did not make enough income to file 2018/19 tax returns are eligible to receive funds.
- Increase unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to workers who do not qualify for the federal UI augmentation, and expand state UI to workers who don't currently qualify for state UI.
- To the extent feasible, eliminate and/or prohibit limitations and exclusions on state and federal COVID response funds that would otherwise restrict access for undocumented and informal economy workers.
- Waive all late fees and penalties for rent, utilities, water, trash and wastewater service during the COVID-19 emergency, and discontinue the use of liens.

- Establish an emergency rental, mortgage and utility assistance fund to eliminate past due balances and secure stability and security for lower income households; forgive rent and utilities payments and debt for lower income families unable to pay as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Fund the purchase and provision of food for food banks, food banks, food distribution centers, food delivery services for low income and elderly populations. Prioritize purchase of food items from small farms and farmers of color.

Ensure Safety and Security of all Californians

- Prohibit ICE personnel from being in sensitive locations, including but not limited to, schools, health centers, places that provide COVID testing, hospitals, emergency medical sites, court houses, food distribution sites, local and state assistance centers and other locations made available to provide emergency assistance to all Californians.

Ensure Safe and Stable Housing

- Institute a statewide eviction moratorium immediately.
- Provide rent relief for lower income households impacted financially by COVID-19 (see above regarding rental, mortgage, and utility assistance fund).
- Create sufficient emergency housing opportunities through requisition and provision of mobile homes, hotel rooms, and other resources for unhoused populations; for people living in farmworker housing that does not allow sufficient space for social distancing, and for populations living in unstable conditions including, for example, tenants of mobile home parks and tenants on Tribal land that don't have the same protections as other tenants.
- Institute a statewide foreclosure moratorium.
- Provide mortgage relief for lower income households impacted financially by COVID-19 (see above regarding rental, mortgage, and utility assistance fund)
- Coordinate with tribal governments to ensure ongoing provision of housing and utilities to tenants and customers throughout the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis.
- Provide rental assistance and utility assistance for residents living on Tribal land to the extent that tenants do not otherwise receive assistance as outlined in this letter.
- Establish an emergency legal assistance fund for not-for-profit organizations to conduct tenant rights education and provide direct legal service.

Access to Drinking Water and Wastewater Services to Protect Public Health

- Allocate emergency funding beyond existing resources to address the urgent, unanticipated needs.
- Restore service to every Californian who has had their service disconnected due to nonpayment, regardless of when the service interruption occurred.
- Allocate resources to address emergency drinking water shortages.
- Allocate resources to address emergency septic system maintenance and repairs.
- Provide financial relief for lower income rate-payers unable to pay for utilities due to COVID related economic impacts (see above regarding rental, mortgage, and utility assistance fund).
- Prohibit all water shutoffs for non-payment or late payments of sewer service fees and for those with a combined water/sewer bill.
- Prohibit late fees and placement of liens for non-payment of water, sewer, trash and other utility services.
- Provide funding to support small drinking water and wastewater service providers impacted by COVID-related revenue shortfalls.

Access to Energy and Internet Service

- Prohibit imposition of late fees, charges and liens by public and CPUC-regulated utilities.
- Prohibit energy and utility disconnections for non-payment for 90 -120 days after the Governor lifts the emergency declaration.
- Allocate resources to support households reliant on propane or wood to cook and heat their homes.
- Ensure rapid deployment of mobile hotspots, especially to rural areas without broadband infrastructure to stay connected with their families, public health notifications, education.

Expand Workforce Development Opportunities to Respond to COVID-19

- Include requirements in workforce development investments related to COVID-19 response that facilitate high quality jobs in underserved areas including, but not limited to, local hire requirements, living wage and benefit provisions, prioritization of women and minority owned businesses, and provision of worker training and certification programs with pipelines to high quality career opportunities, including careers in a growing clean energy sector.
- Allocate funding to train health professionals who will serve underserved areas, address those regions' healthcare gaps, and maintain cultural and linguistic abilities and backgrounds to serve communities of color, immigrants, and low-income rural areas.

Strengthen Workforce Protections

- Allocate resources to provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and access to soap and water and hand sanitizer to frontline workers including farmworkers, food processing workers, bus drivers, truck drivers, warehouse workers, grocery store workers, food bank volunteers and other essential volunteers and paid workers during this pandemic. This must include providing PPE for farmworkers and others working outdoors during wildfire season.
- Mandate physical distancing measures and provision of safety equipment to keep farm, food, and warehouse workers safe.
- Direct state resources to expand paid sick and family leave access to people who work for employers with fewer than 50 employees and require employers with more than 500 employees to provide these same benefits. Farmworkers, food processing workers, domestic workers and other frontlines workers must share in this benefit.
- Provide hazard pay for essential and frontline workers during the pandemic.

Expand Healthcare Access to Vulnerable Populations

- Allocate resources to provide free COVID-19 testing and treatment for all who need it, including individuals who are undocumented.
- Expand Medi-Cal benefits to all lower income, undocumented Californians.

Secure Emergency Resources to Transportation Systems

- Direct resources to subsidize public transit agencies to help them survive the COVID-19 crisis and provide safe, clean transportation for those who use transit for essential work, grocery shopping, healthcare, childcare, and other needs.
- Prioritize mobility for workers and ensure safe, operational transit for essential workers, agricultural vanpools and other rural transportation that allows for physical distancing.

Environmental Protection and Environmental Justice

- Prohibit delays in establishing and implementing air quality, water quality, and climate regulations and rulemaking procedures at the local, regional, or statewide levels.
- Prevent or prohibit rollbacks of existing air quality, water quality, and climate regulations at the local, regional, or statewide levels.
- Accelerate regulatory actions to protect public health, reduce exposure to harmful pollutants and reduce overall pollution.
- Direct funding for community identified priority projects including projects that promote improved air quality, climate resilience, provide increased access to green space, and promote social cohesion.

Ensure Authentic Public Participation

- Mandate that local and statewide agencies allow for remote participation in public meetings and hearings for the duration of the stay-at-home order (attached is a more detailed letter on best practices for equitable remote public participation). We will also provide best practices for equitable remote public participation for legislative and committee hearings.
- Invest in infrastructure to allow for remote public participation from geographically and economically isolated areas for the course of the Covid-19 crisis and beyond.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these priorities and strategies at your convenience. Please feel free to reach out to us directly at (310) 980-6494 or pseaton@leadershipcounsel.org.

Respectfully,

Phoebe Seaton, Co-Executive Director, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Luz Gallegos, Community Programs Director, TODEC Legal Center

Caroline Farrell, Executive Director, Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment

Margarita Rocha, Executive Director, Centro La Familia

Sandra Celedon, President and CEO, Fresno Building Healthy Communities

Nataly Santamaria, Kern County Promotora Network Manager, Vision y Compromiso

Heather Vaikona, President and CEO, Lift To Rise

Andy Levine, Deputy Director, Faith in the Valley

Ashley Rojas, Executive Director, Fresno Barrios Unidos

Kassandra Hishida, Coordinator, Community Alliance for Agroecology

Alejandra Garcia, Strategic and Policy Facilitator, Building Healthy Communities – Kern

Sahara Huazano, Director of Capacity Development, Alianza Coachella Valley

Suguet Lopez, Executive Director, Lideres Campesinas

Kevin Hamilton, Executive Director, Central California Asthma Collaborative

Yammilette Rodriguez, Senior Director, Central Valley, Youth Leadership Institute

Tom Collinshaw, President, Self Help Enterprises

Jonathan Nelson, Policy Director, Community Water Center

Dr. Tania Pacheco-Werner, Sanger resident

Sergio Carranza, Executive Director, Pueblo Unido Community Development Corporation

Ana Padilla, Director, Civic Capacity Research Initiative, University of California Merced

Cha Vang, Director, Hmong Innovating Politics

Sarah K Hutchinson, Policy Director & Interim Co-Executive Director, ACT for Women & Girls

Sarah Aird, Co-Executive Director, Californians for Pesticide Reform

Lourdes Herrera, Madera Coalition for Community Justice