



August 11, 2020

Board of Supervisors, Merced County
2222 M Street
Board Room, Third Floor
Merced CA, 95340

RE: Cares Act Funding Plan

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability writes in partnership with Power California-99Rootz, Faith in the Valley, and Journey for Justice. We work alongside low-income communities of color in the San Joaquin Valley and the Eastern Coachella Valley. 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 invest in these communities in unprecedented ways to confront economic injustices faced by Merced County residents.

We have seen the devastating toll COVID-19 has had on the Latinx community. According to the Merced County Department of Public Health, 74% of cases have been Hispanic,¹ not counting a large portion of the population in vulnerable communities that have not been tested. Communities of color have, not only been disproportionately affected, but also disproportionately left behind. According to the guidance released by the State for funding availability under section 601(a) of the Social Security Act, as added by section 5001 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (“CARES Act”), “expenditures must be used for actions taken to respond to second-order effects of the emergency, such as by providing economic support to those suffering from employment.”² As a first step in mitigating and overcoming the impacts on lower income inland Californian households and neighborhoods through crisis, we urge you to take swift and decisive action on community priorities identified below.

¹ CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) June 9, 2020

² This version updates the guidance provided under “Costs incurred during the period that begins on March 1, 2020, and ends on December 30, 2020”

Establish Disaster Response Fund to Support Economic Security of all Merced County residents

- Establish an emergency mortgage, rent, utilities and food assistance program no less than \$6 million in aid. Ensure that residents who are disproportionately impacted and who have not received prior aid are prioritized.
- Establish a program for funding that will give support to residents who are unable to work due to COVID-19 impacts; such as providing financial support for residents who test positive by allocating \$1,300 for up to two weeks and \$2,300 for up to four weeks; allocating up to \$5,000,000 for these supports.
- Create protections for employees by placing an ordinance where upon confirmation of a positive COVID-19 case among an employee or customer of a business, the employer shall notify all employees of the possible exposure as soon as possible but within a timeframe that does not exceed 24 hours; ensure employers notify employees of available COVID-19 benefits; ensure employers provide adequate social distancing to employees; enforce employers to provide PPE as well as proper ventilation to employees; enforce additional testing sites for farmworkers and meatpacking companies during work hours; a reporting hotline number where a customer or employee may anonymously report violations of this subsection that result in an unsafe environment. The County must ensure there are punitive measures for employers who fail to comply with this ordinance.
- Establish a COVID-19 prevention program for vulnerable populations: deploy nurses to the fields and food processing plants; farmworker alternative housing to quarantine and recover in hotels with meals and healthcare provided; improve contact tracing in disadvantaged communities; ramp up bilingual education on radio, television, social media and billboards.
- Establish a medical assistance program for residents who do not have health insurance and have been affected by COVID-19; provide free COVID-19 testing to everyone regardless of immigration status.
- Increase access to mental health services to disadvantaged communities in Merced County by allocating \$1,000,000 in CARES funds to the Merced County Health Department's Behavioral Health Branch or open RFP to organizations who already provide services and programs to vulnerable populations.
- Provide at least \$2,000,000 in financial support to small businesses and non-profit organizations with fewer than twenty employees, **who have not previously received state/federal or county financial assistance.**

Every supervisor has heard from residents in each of their districts. Residents have given testimonies of their hardship and asked for your support. We hope that you respond to their requests and use the CARES Act funding for community priorities. Thank you in advance for your response to this letter. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with you to achieve our shared goals and priorities for the health and future of Merced.

Sincerely,

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