



May 18, 2020

Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus

Re: General comments on coronavirus impacts

Co-Chair Roblan, Co-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Joint Committee:

Thank you for your leadership in Oregon's response to the coronavirus outbreak. We are grateful to you, Governor Brown, and the many other leaders for taking action at this crucial moment. On behalf of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), we are writing to call for critical interventions to preserve the wellbeing of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) and all Oregonians. APANO works to unite Oregon's AAPIs for social change and racial justice through advocacy, organizing, cultural strategy, and community development.

This crisis will impact everyone in our state, but the Asian community has been particularly affected since the outbreak made the news in January. Early on, we saw discrimination and stigma targeting individuals, as well as a large downturn in patronage at restaurants and businesses in the Jade District. This fallout continues and these communities are in urgent need of support as the crisis worsens. Employees have been laid off and hours have been cut, leaving these workers especially vulnerable. And as the crisis worsens, those impacted by our state and country's legacy of racial discrimination and its ongoing manifestations—Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, including Asians and Pacific Islanders—will be among the worst impacted.

Our state's response through public assistance and social services is a critical component of our overall public health response. If families are unable to access food, remain in housing, afford medicine or healthcare, and purchase other necessities, the consequences of this outbreak will have devastating effects on individuals and families. To that end, some of the high-level solutions we suggest are:

Support and protections for workers and families

- All people in need of financial assistance should receive the resources they need to stabilize, no matter the type of job they do, how they are paid, or their residency status. We must immediately increase flexibility with unemployment insurance and efficiency in processing.
- People who are not eligible for unemployment insurance or sick leave need urgent support. Unemployment insurance will be an incredibly important program to stabilize workers, but workers who are not eligible for this or other programs are even more vulnerable.
- Ensure that there are jobs to come back to and provide job protections as we support employers.
- Flexible cash assistance is one of the most effective ways to help families stabilize.

Relief to small businesses

- Low or no-interest loans or carefully targeted grant programs would help businesses increase their cash flow so they can meet necessary expenses and minimize layoffs or reductions in hours.
- Small businesses with no cash flow should not lose their leases due to COVID-19. To that end, the state should issue a moratorium on commercial evictions. For the businesses that APANO works with, rents are a substantial expense.

Health care access

- Provide free testing, treatment, and preventive care for COVID-19 infections and suspected cases. No one should hesitate to delay care or get tested out of fear of cost.
- As we respond to the immediate needs of this crisis, we must also consider the mental health care response. Many APANO members have reported a lack of access to mental health care, and addressing the anxiety and trauma caused by a protracted crisis will be

Immigrants

- The state must lead in ensuring that any emergency assistance does not have implications for those subject to the public charge rule. USCIS has already issued guidance but we must ensure this message is clearly coming from the state.
- Any additional programs must include all Oregonians regardless of their immigration or residency status; if current or federal programs do not allow for this eligibility, the state must take responsibility and adjust this for critical programs such as food assistance.

Meeting Essential Needs

- **Protections for renters:** The state must implement an immediate statewide moratorium on evictions and suspension of any late fees for renters who have lost income, whether they are themselves ill with COVID-19 or have been impacted financially. This protection must not be arduous for the renter, and renters' should only be required to demonstrate prima facie their loss of income. We also need to consider how to suspend evictions based on any reasons not related to safety or habitability. For example, many AAPI families live in larger, intergenerational households that may exceed restrictive occupancy requirements. At this time, strict enforcement of lease provisions could worsen the impact of the public health crisis.
- **Housing assistance:** We must develop a program to provide direct cash assistance or vouchers to pay rents going forward and to address debt from nonpayment of rent. We know that there will be a massive need for housing assistance. Similarly, we will need to address the needs of homeowners below the self-sufficiency standard who are unable to make their mortgage payments.
- **Homelessness assistance:** This is the time to infuse resources for people currently facing housing instability or homelessness, and in anticipation of the increased need for these services as the economic fallout continues.

- **Utilities:** The state must prohibit utility shutoffs and late fees. We applaud the utility companies who have already volunteered to do so but this moratorium must remain throughout the crisis.
- **Childcare:** With the closure of schools, we must ensure that working families have access to childcare, and that our understanding of critical workers extends beyond healthcare providers to include those on the frontlines of this pandemic, including retail workers, couriers, and others who are providing essential services.
- **Additional supports** include transportation assistance programs to alleviate burdens for low-income essential workers, and access to technology that is essential to keeping communities informed, healthy, and connected. We also must invest resources into anti-poverty programs such as food assistance.

General guidelines

- Black, Indigenous, and communities of color must be centered in our response. Many of these families and communities have the fewest assets and resources that will enable them to recover. As we build long-range solutions for economic development and family stability, these communities must be considered.
- Any governing bodies must be truly inclusive of Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities, with authentic decision-making power. Conversations around economic development must have robust representation from small business owners of color, since these businesses build wealth, create jobs, and are often important cultural and community resources.
- All information should be made as accessible as possible with translation, interpretation, and live resources and hotlines where communities can go for help.
- We must still exercise sound policymaking at the same time as we move swiftly: families and workers should continue to have the protections we have built into our state policies and equity should be at the core of our policymaking.

We also note that we have signed on in support of testimony submitted by our partners, including on childcare, energy assistance, communities of color, small business, and broader social justice partners that provide important recommendations in greater detail.

Thank you for your consideration of these broad responses to the unprecedented emergency that we are facing. APANO is committed to working with you on developing the urgent policy solutions our communities need and, again, we are grateful for your service.

Sincerely,
Jenny Lee, Advocacy Director
Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon