

Do you feel the thorns pricking your heart
Do you feel your soul ripping apart
Do you feel this constant unrelenting force
Do you feel your voice going hoarse
I say
As this hope I lay
I yell
Even if my throat is swell
Let it hurt
And feel the dirt
Let it cry
But never not try
Let it pain
For it will not be in vain
Let it burn
For only then it will yearn
For happiness, for prosperity
For a deep sense of community
For peace, for love,
For togetherness in the world
Let it rise
To the possibility of becoming wise
Let it shine
For then the glory shall be fine

~Sush 3/15/2020

Dear Joint Special Committee Members for CoronaVirus Response,

My name is Sushmita Poddar and I am a small business owner, an entrepreneur, an artist, a community member, and most of all a Civic Leader residing in Washington County. I am actively engaged with the community and government to ensure equity and inclusion is the basis of all decisions that we make together for the community. ALL communities and interests.

I have spent the last 5 days filling more than 50 forms for information and assistance, writing close to 400+ comments on social media, reading 1000+ testimonies of small business owners, countless community member's plight and participating and supporting community led efforts. I have also scoured every possible place for immediate and urgent actions and communications by local governments. Alas not much is being seen. Thus here I am requesting you please please listen to people, do what needs to be done now; we will worry about the future tomorrow. I never thought that a woman who immigrated to another country at the age of 20, studied here at PSU with multiple degrees, started her own business (5 of them)supported a family, supported a community and made personal life decisions that made her proud would feel the need to ever BEG in front of anybody. Yet that is what I am doing, not just on my behalf, on our behalf. For all of us, in front of those who have the power to make change happen. I don't have that power. But you do.

Where is proactive and preemptive leadership? Considering that we have been asked to prepare for the “Big One” for years, LOCAL government/ Regional Government and State Government must have a rapid response team ready to gather information and share information. Emergency aid should kick in immediately with proper and systematic communication with the community especially those that are actionable. We are just handling a quarantine! What if this was an earthquake with actual physical damages? Then what would we have done? It’s scary to think about it. But I am glad I am not in Utah today where it did happen. People are ok with little because it is better than nothing. Why should community settle for less than the possibility of amazing leadership?

Schools and Children because I care :

Thank you to the Governor for ensuring that the kids have food. But are efforts truly equitable. All School Districts should send buses to distribute the food. Parents are stuck at work or stuck at home, or have routines with kids. Some don’t have cars or are sick. Some are taking care of sick elders or children. Schools are also not accessible by public transit (nor should folks be in them) So how are they expected to drive 1-10 miles with children to get 1 bag of food. Plus food stored outside in the sun for pickup is going waste. Sometimes friends are driving other children to school. Do we really want them in the same car?

Is there someone ensuring that children are safe at home? What about those children who have faced abuse or at risk? Is someone ensuring that there is a team coordinating childcare for those that have to work like medical, government and grocery? Who will look after them, and what about the added expense? Who is ensuring that those who are acting like soldiers in our war with virus feel that they and their families are being taken care of?

Small Business (Including Arts):

“Small business owners, entrepreneurs, self-employed, artists, arts organizations, freelancers, seem to be the ones continuously left out of conversations and help. Most do not have health care due to affordability and they do not get sick leave. They cannot file for OHP because they have an income however basic it is and it is subjective to economic changes.

Rent/ Mortgages/ Utilities and Assistance especially for Small Businesses:

COVID Crisis is impacting small businesses, micro businesses, freelancers, contractors and artists drastically. The impact is unprecedented and has blindsided folks responsible for sometimes paying 2 rents, 2 utilities, business expenses, immediate personal expenses, healthcare, employees, taxes, food, and transportation. Most can’t even afford supporting families if they are a new business. After all of that is paid maybe just maybe there is savings or money for misc. expenses. Nor can they file for any benefits from the state or feds. There is no recovery for them. Their credits are doomed. Businesses are lost. Life as they know it is finished and they may never be able to restart their business. Their future dreams, hopes and aspirations. All gone unless they know they have a job/businesses to go back to. Help ensure that all those individuals we have encouraged to take the risk, be an entrepreneur, add vibrancy to communities are truly being supported. They need all rent payments/mortgages and utility payments

to be frozen (personal and business) so that they can continue to support their families and the freeze has to continue for a few months after the quarantine is lifted as people will need time to access losses and damages and rebuild client confidence and business. Rental agencies can write off the loss from rent at the end of the year when the state mandates it. They are asking how they are supposed to evict everyone? But these self-employed individuals and businesses are basically INCOMLESS. ”

For the past few years as a civic leader I have been in rooms and spaces where I heard stories of desperation and harsh times. Stories of pain and disaster. Stories that have made me cry and sob. Stories that charged me up and gave me fire. And times when I wondered what was that one tipping point when you just know and discover the one thing that no one is talking about. They are not even on the table. I guess I needed this kick in my gut to find that.

I have promised myself that moving forward while I put in efforts towards the needs of all community members, I will ensure that I work double hard, knock on a million doors and offices, talk to anyone and everyone whether they want to listen or not, but ensure that THEY are on the table when leaders are discussing issues/circumstances that impact communities.

I understand the pain they must be feeling. I FEEL IT. There is no equity in the solutions and help for them. I AM ONE OF THEM while I also ensure that I keep myself safe strong and healthy for the uncertain future ahead.

Please,

Help us stay healthy, stay safe and believe that our government is **OF the people, FOR the people and BY the people**. You have the power and resources to implement changes and give hope. Please use it wisely, efficiently and quickly. Today, we are looking up to our leaders to pave the way for us and support us just like we supported you.

Regards,

-Sushmita

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Civic Leader

Founder & Owner

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