



March 20, 2020

TO: Oregon Legislative Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response

FROM: Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility and
Doctors for Camp Closure--OR Chapter

Dear Senator Arnie Roblan, Representative Paul Holvey and Members of the Joint Special Task Force:

We write as Oregonians from the health professionals to urge you to address and prioritize issues of equity in the critical response to the COVID-19 crisis. It is not overstating the seriousness of this situation with regard to health and social disparities creating a far greater burden on communities of color, individuals living in poverty, those who are undocumented and the houseless. To be a *healthy* community, all of us must have financial, housing, food, health, educational stability and access to resources in all of these areas. Health equity means that some communities, due to a larger burden from poverty, racism, exclusion as immigrants will have the need and deserve a particular focus as we allocate resources. **We urge you to consider every recommendation from your committee through an equity lens.**

From our variety of backgrounds in the health professions, we all take the oath of ethics to “do no harm”. Policies that do not focus on equity needs may, inadvertently, cause harm to the communities with needs not adequately and fairly addressed.

We ask that you take into account and design recommendations that address the particular vulnerabilities of the immigrant community include the following:

- **Farmworker aid package.** Farmworkers are putting their lives at risk by continuing to work in the fields. Farmworkers already work at low wages and with many occupational risks. The risk of COVID-19 exposure is added to these harsh conditions. These are individuals who continue their labor so that we may all eat from the abundance of Oregon’s agricultural bounty.
- **Grant financial resources/Emergency funds for non-profit organizations of the state who serve immigrants, refugees, day laborers, farmworkers, and people of color--** all of whom will be disproportionately impacted by COVID19.

- **Address the special needs of all those with DACA and TPS Status.** Assure that DACA and TPS recipients can qualify and apply for unemployment benefits.
- **Statewide rent/mortgage freezes,** Eviction moratoriums are a good first step, but forgiving these costs will go a long way to not adding debt onto those least able to afford it.
- **Invest in a worker and family support hotline** that gives people real-time answers in a variety of languages on their rights under existing law and information about programs they may qualify for (including health care, rental assistance, child care assistance, food assistance). Such a hotline can also help businesses with questions. It will be important that accurate information is available about how service access does or does not impact immigration status. The immigration legal community can help with these answers.
- **Promote the investment in community organizations with existing relationships to vulnerable populations.** Such groups are essential now more than ever to be able to provide needed and trusted outreach for sharing accurate and critical information to the most vulnerable communities and to help community members navigate the systems of support that will be available. Such groups provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
- **Create a grant program providing funds for small businesses owned by Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC)** communities who are hit at hugely unequal rates in the loss of profits due to COVID-19
- **Support the release of all youth in juvenile detention centers by using the power of parole, sentence commutation, and other modalities of community mental health treatment.**
- **Assure that ALL Oregonians have access to full health care regardless of immigration status.** Expand the wonderful *Cover All Kids* plan to all ages.

Sincerely,

Maxine Fookson, RN, MN, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (retired)
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

Ann Turner, MD

Steering Committee, Doctors for Camp Closure--OR Chapter