

National Headquarters
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www.astho.org
@ASTHO

July 14, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), I am writing to bring your attention to the upcoming expiration (expected to end on or before July 31, 2020) of a critical measure, included as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act – P.L. No. 116-136, that increases unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to support Americans who are currently unemployed. Specifically, section 2104 – Emergency Increase in Unemployment Compensation Benefits - of the CARES Act provides resources to states allowing them to provide an additional \$600.00 per week to individuals receiving unemployment compensation, as part of the federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (PUC) program. ASTHO urges Congress to extend this benefit in the next emergency supplemental bill.

As the organization representing state and territorial health officials, our members have a strong understanding of needs in the public health and healthcare systems, considering our nation's collective response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. One of the devastating results of the pandemic has been its impact on lower wage workers and communities of color. According to APM Research Labs, the mortality rate of African Americans is 2.3 times higher than Whites and Asians. As it pertains to other groups, 1 in 2,300 Indigenous Americans, 1 in 3,100 Pacific Islander Americans, 1 in 3,200 Latino Americans and 1 in 3,700 Asian Americans have died as a result of the pandemic¹. In addition to the disparate impact on communities of color, over 44 million Americans have filed for unemployment, with 20.9 million individuals receiving UI benefits and over 11 million receiving PUC benefits².

While we are grateful for Congressional action to support American families during this very difficult time, inaction to extend these benefits, at a time where we are seeing a rise in confirmed cases, will slow down our nation's recovery from the pandemic. Furthermore, this will similarly impact the public health of our nation when considering the role of structural and determinants of health and its effect on communities of color, as well as how enhanced benefits assist families in following public health guidelines. It remains vitally important that we continue to do all that we can to serve our communities by assuring that all individuals can live as healthy as possible, even under the current circumstances. Continued investment to supplement UI benefits, is a benefit to the overall public health our nation and specifically those most impacted the coronavirus.

¹ <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race>

² <https://www.dol.gov/ui/data.pdf>

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We look forward to working with you to address this critical issue. Please contact Jeffrey Ekoma, director, federal government affairs, ASTHO (jekoma@astho.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Fraser". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name of the signatory.

Michael Fraser, PhD, MS, CAE, FCPP
Chief Executive Officer
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials