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**American Federation
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Organizations**

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April 9, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Our country is at a critical juncture in the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 14,000 people have died and more than 400,000 others have been infected in the United States—an underestimate of the real problem because of inadequate testing. The final toll of this disease could be the loss of more than a million lives if the federal government does not take more immediate and direct action to protect the lives of working people. We have lost health care workers, flight attendants, grocery workers, bus drivers, manufacturing workers and many others who have sacrificed their lives to provide essential services to the public.

Essential workers do not have the choice to stay home from work, are on the frontlines of this crisis, and urgently need essential, commonsense safety protections. Just yesterday, CDC issued dangerous new guidelines. These still do not protect essential workers on the frontlines: They are advising employers that workers who have had close contact with a COVID-19 infected individual but remain asymptomatic may continue to work, rather than be sent home. This ignores firmly established science that there is a significant rate of transmission from asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals. These extremely reckless guidelines were not issued to protect workers but rather to ensure the continuity of business profits, and will be responsible for many more deaths of those working on our front lines. Revoke these guidelines immediately.

Our federal government's response to our greatest needs as a country has been wholly inadequate and is responsible for the rapid increase in deaths. During a war, it would be a total abdication of authority for the federal government to not have command of its generals and its troops. This is a national battle. Yet, the federal government is failing miserably and place private sector profits over public health and safety. For-profit distributors have not sent enough equipment to areas with the most cases, leaving workers without adequate protections to do their jobs. To be successful, we need public transparency and much stronger federal control over the location, distribution, use and manufacture of supplies.

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Likewise, the federal government has not adequately used its authority to allocate and prioritize safety equipment and medical supplies to the people who most desperately need them. Months into this crisis, the government is only beginning to take minimal action.

While this contagious disease has been running rampant through our hospitals, nursing homes and communities, the supply of adequate respiratory protection has been diminished, its importance discounted through weak federal guidance and its distribution misdirected—or totally absent. As COVID-19 infections continue surging in New York, New Jersey and many other communities, respiratory protections made in the United States were being sent overseas. Meanwhile, imported supplies are being sent to private distributors, rather than the frontline workers in hard-hit areas. This administration has left America's workforce at the mercy of the private market and told governors they are on their own. Infectious diseases know no state boundaries. Without national leadership, transmission rates and deaths will continue to surge.

Under the law, employers have the obligation to protect workers' health and safety, and the federal government is responsible for this oversight. Instead, worker protections have been downgraded at a time when they are needed most, leading to a direct impact on working conditions and the care of our most vulnerable. Health care workers are bearing the major brunt of this crisis with the greatest exposures to COVID-19 patients, but this administration has weakened infection control recommendations that specifically would have protected these workers. Additionally, the administration refuses to issue and enforce OSHA and MSHA emergency workplace standards that would protect those health care workers and all other essential workers.

While the federal government has refused to take a stronger leadership role, telling states and workers they must face this pandemic on their own, working people are standing together. We are not alone in the labor movement, as together, we demand the protections required to keep us safe on the job. We deserve a consistent and evidence-based response by the federal government—nothing less.

We need to protect all essential workers' lives. The attached memorandum identifies several immediate actions the White House must take to save the lives of health care workers to slow and stop the spread of the virus. OSHA and MSHA must strongly enforce existing requirements and issue new emergency standards—employers must be required to implement necessary controls and procedures to protect all workers against COVID-19 on the job. Working people must be protected from retaliation for raising job safety concerns. The CDC must strengthen its guidelines for protecting healthcare workers and revoke the new guidelines that put essential workers in danger.

We cannot weather this storm if we do not require that employers provide adequate safety protections and if we do not centralize protective equipment to those on the frontline.

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How we treat those working on the frontline will determine how we protect all workers and how we survive this crisis as a country.

The White House must act with urgency. Lives are on the line.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard L. Trumka", with a stylized flourish at the end.

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