



March 18, 2020

Letter to Governor Cuomo, Mayor de Blasio, and State and City elected officials

Re: Supporting independent workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Today we are facing the greatest crisis to the freelance workforce in modern history. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the health and livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Americans, and freelancers face a disproportionate risk of financial hardship. Yet, we have not heard a clear plan from our government on a relief plan for this vital workforce.

Freelancers, who make up over 34% of New York City's workforce and contribute an estimated \$1 trillion to the country's GDP, face extreme levels of income insecurity, working without a safety net. Unlike traditional employees, freelancers are excluded from receiving paid leave and unemployment insurance, and shoulder the cost of their own health and disability insurance. Without a concerted effort to extend relief to these workers, the economic impact of COVID-19 on independent workers will be nothing less than devastating.

Freelancers Union represents more than 500,000 members nationally — 170,000 of whom are in New York State. More than 80% of the freelancers surveyed by Freelancers Union reported losing thousands of dollars in wages because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number that will only increase as the crisis continues. They're unsure how they will be able to pay the bills if public gatherings are prohibited, events are cancelled, and jobs continue to be lost in the coming weeks and months, and they need the government to step up and provide relief.

We urge New York State and New York City to include independent workers in all worker relief policies. Specifically:

1. Establish a temporary emergency measure to provide zero-interest loans to New York's small businesses, including freelancers.
2. Ensure that freelancers have access to all emergency paid sick leave plans and family medical leave plans, regardless of their employment status.
3. Establish disaster unemployment assistance programs that include all working freelancers and self-employed workers who have lost income due to the impacts of COVID-19.
4. Institute tax breaks and deferments of tax payments for self-employed individuals.

Freelancers constitute over one-third of New York's workforce. They are being left out of critical government relief efforts. We must pass paid sick leave and other financial support measures for struggling businesses to include the millions of independent workers that drive our cities and country forward.

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