

May 13, 2020

Letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi

Re: Fair inclusion of self-employed workers in federal coronavirus relief packages

We write today to express deep concern that during this pandemic, millions of freelance and self-employed workers are experiencing unprecedented income loss and have been unable to access the government assistance that they desperately need.

Freelancers, who are at the front lines of coronavirus response, are among the hardest hit by COVID-19 closures. The numbers are shocking. Freelancers Union, which represents over half a million members, found in a member survey released on May 1 that more than **86% of freelancers had already lost thousands of dollars in wages, and that 84% of freelancers who had applied for government relief had not received any money.**

It's been more than a month since the CARES Act passed, which commendably created an inclusive Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program to serve freelancers and self-employed people as well as employees. Unfortunately, key elements of the program have resulted in freelancers not qualifying for sufficient assistance, and in some cases being shut out from relief entirely.

While states updated their systems and expanded their capacity to process an unprecedented number of unemployment claims from employees, application systems for freelancers and the self-employed lagged for weeks. Today, applications are still not available in some states.

Moreover, freelancer applicants who reported earning even a small amount of W-2 income were deemed ineligible for PUA and traditional unemployment insurance, as the systems have not adequately taken into consideration individuals who earn a mix of 1099 and W-2 income, a common scenario for many freelancers.

Freelancers — including self-employed, sole proprietors, and other independent workers — comprise over 57 million members of America's workforce and contribute an estimated \$1 trillion to its GDP. An estimated 31.9 million workers earn both W-2 and 1099 income. The current PUA system is not serving these workers, and we need to do better.

**We urge you today to support freelancers and all Americans in the next relief bill by instituting the proposals below.**

1. **Extend a monthly stimulus payment of \$2,000** for up to 12 months, as proposed in the Monthly Economic Crisis Support Act, to all Americans regardless of citizenship status.
2. **Establish rent and mortgage forgiveness**, as proposed in the Rent and Mortgage Cancellation Act.
3. **Require states to include all income for freelancers in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance eligibility determinations and assistance calculations** to ensure that freelancers are fairly awarded unemployment assistance. Specifically, states should

calculate benefits using all income earned within the previous calendar year, including W-2, 1099 Misc, gross income reported on a Schedule C, and other self-reported income.

4. **Expand federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance to include all workers who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.** Current guidance extends PUA to individuals who are quarantined or have contracted COVID-19, are caring for family members with COVID-19, or have had their places of employment shut down because of COVID-19. This definition causes confusion and leaves out the hundreds of thousands of freelancers who have experienced canceled contracts due to the sharp decline in the economy.
5. **Extend Pandemic Unemployment Assistance indefinitely** until the coronavirus crisis ends.

Unemployment benefits are a critical financial lifeline for freelance workers who are struggling with unprecedented income loss. I urge you to prioritize these policy changes to fairly include freelancers in government relief, and provide needed support to the millions of freelance workers that drive our country forward.

Freelancers Union

American Photographic Artists

American Society of Journalists and Authors

American Society of Media Photographers

Future of Music Coalition

Graphic Artists Guild

National Press Photographers Association

National Writers Union

September Williams, MD, Bioethicist, Author

Sisters in Crime

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

Songwriters Guild of America

The Authors Guild

The Dramatists Guild of America

Alliance of Documentary Editors

Association of Independents in Radio (AIR)

Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC)

Documentary Producers Alliance

Film Independent

Firelight Media

FWD-Doc (Documentary Filmmakers with Disabilities)

International Documentary Association

Kartemquin Films

New Orleans Film Society

New York Foundation for the Arts

New York Women in Film & Television

Producers Guild of America, Inc.

Programmers of Colour Collective

Third Coast Audio

Women Make Movies

Youth FX - NeXt Doc Fellowship