

ROADMAP TO RECOVERY



**Avoid a
Housing
Crisis**

People-Centered Policy Solutions to the COVID-19 Crisis

Louisianans have suffered through more than our fair share of disasters. And while disasters are devastating on their own, our response, recovery, and relief efforts have often compounded the tragedy by diminishing or ignoring our most vulnerable communities, particularly poor communities and communities of color.

Our collective response to this disaster needs to be different than it has been in the past. We must center people, especially our most vulnerable populations, in every way we approach this response and recovery effort. The policies laid out in this document will help us achieve that goal immediately, but they should also serve as a roadmap for the kind of long-term reforms we need to enact if we want to build and sustain a more equitable and just society here in Louisiana, in this country, and around the world.



**Protect
Workers,
Children &
Families**



**Protect
Health and
Safety in
Jails, Prisons,
Juvenile
Facilities and
Immigrant
Detention
Centers**



State Budget



**Protect
Democracy**



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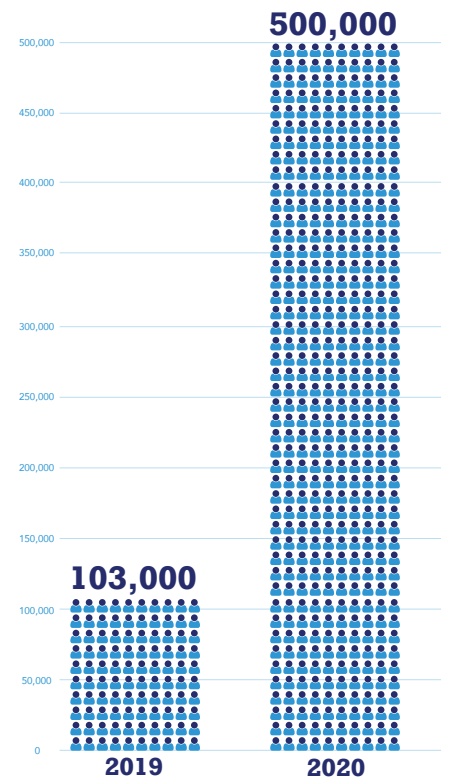
Workers, Children & Families

For years, it's been obvious that we haven't been giving our workers and families the support they need, and this disaster is making that reality even more obvious. The people who make our state and our economy run, particularly our most vulnerable workers and families, need a comprehensive recovery approach that addresses their myriad needs, including workers' rights, child care, education, healthcare, the environment, and transportation.

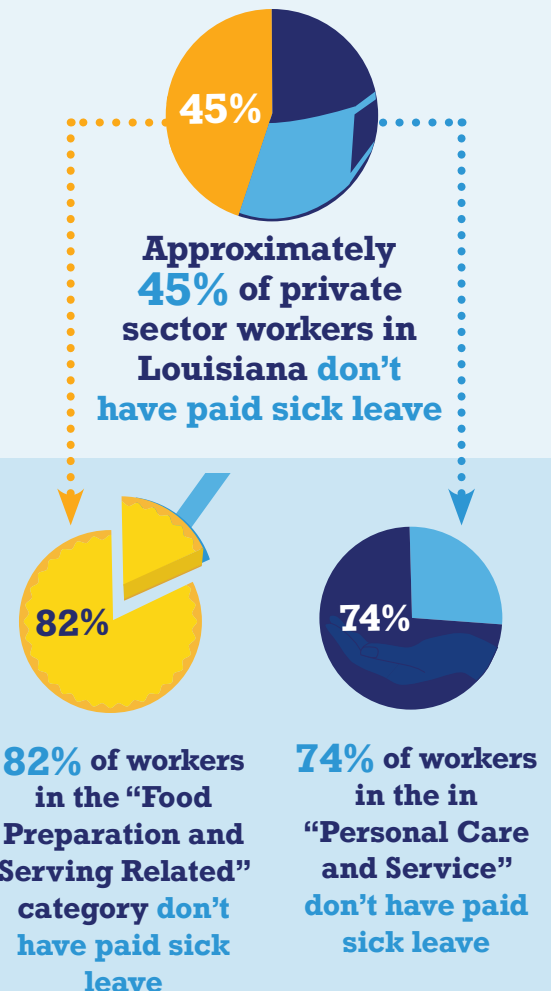
Workers

- **Ensure that every frontline worker has PPE**
- **Ensure that every frontline worker gets hazard pay**, including backpay for time already worked
- **Enshrine statewide paid sick leave and/or local control of paid sick leave into law** through a legislative instrument ([House Bill 832](#) and/or [House Bill 797](#))
- **Raise the state minimum wage** and/or give local government the freedom to raise local wage floors so more workers will be able to save money to take care of themselves and their families in times of crisis.
- For the duration of the Public Health Emergency first declared by the Governor on March 11, 2020, plus an additional 60 days, no debt collector may:
 - Initiate, file, or threaten to file any new collection lawsuit;
 - Initiate, threaten to initiate, or act upon any legal or equitable remedy for the garnishment, seizure, attachment, or withholding of wages, earnings, property or funds for the payment of a debt, except for collection actions for child support payments owed by a parent that are delivered to a custodial parent for the current support of a child who is still a minor
 - Initiate, threaten to initiate, or act upon any legal, or equitable or technological remedy to repossess or deprive a person of the use of any vehicle
 - All currently issued writs of execution hereby stay until 60 days after the expiration of the Governor's March 11, 2020 Public Health Emergency order. Any property garnished or attached after April 10, 2020, must be released back to the judgment debtor

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of 2018, Louisiana had the highest percentage of workers (5.3%) earning at or below the minimum wage of any state in the U.S.



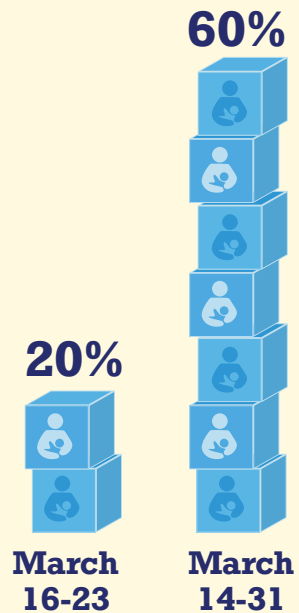
More than 500,000 Louisianans filed unemployment claims in 2020, compared to 103,000 during all of 2019.



Workers, Children & Families

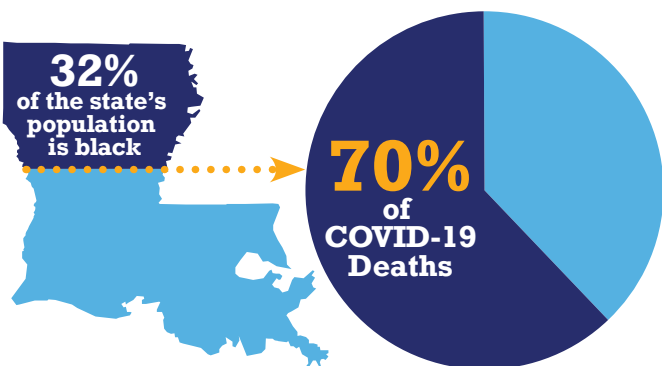
Children & Child Care

- **Provide grants and small business loans to child care providers** who have closed their businesses or suffered financial losses during the pandemic
- Louisiana is receiving \$65 million in CCDF funds from the CARES Act. **The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) should prioritize this money to:**
 - **Purchase PPE and other necessary supplies** to ensure safety in centers providing respite child care
 - **Increase child care assistance payments** to local market rates
 - Cover the cost of treatment of any uninsured child care worker **providing essential workers with respite child who contracts COVID-19**, regardless of immigration status
- LDOE should pay out enough to **provide respite for child care workers to earn at least \$15 an hour**, given the risks they are taking on by providing child care
- Immediately apply for a waiver to remove the five-year waiting period for lawfully residing **immigrant children to become eligible for Medicaid**
- Re-institute "initial eligibility" to allow **families to access CCAP while searching for work**



From March 16-23, **20%** of child care providers reported having to close their program or business, and another **15%** anticipated closing.

In the week following the survey, the percentage of **closed providers rose to 60%**, according to data from the Louisiana Department of Education.



Through early April, **Black people accounted for approximately 70% of the deaths from COVID-19 in Louisiana**, while making up only 32% of the state's population.

Healthcare

- **Create an emergency state health fund** for the uninsured and people whose health insurance won't cover their COVID-19 treatment
- **Authorize the purchase of medical equipment and supplies to restock after the pandemic subsides**, and order enough to provide an emergency backup stock of medical equipment and supplies in case there is another outbreak or other statewide health emergency
- **Collect and release racial data on coronavirus health outcomes** so we can better understand how the virus is affecting different communities and see if it is having any disproportionate impacts
- Release data on **nursing home infection clusters**

Workers, Children & Families

Education

Ensure full equity during school closures:

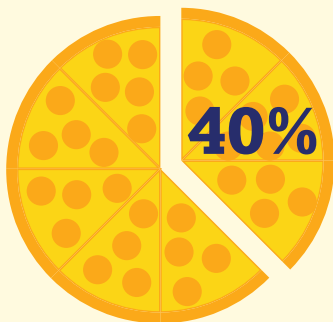
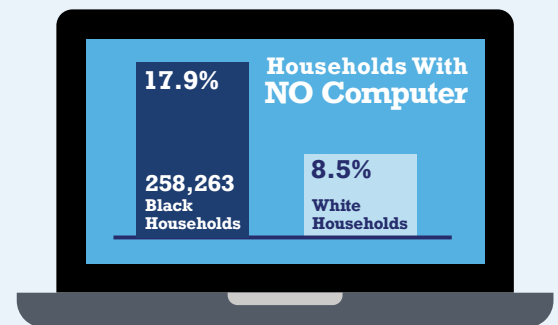
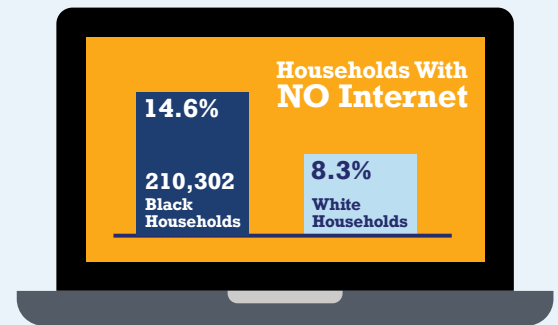
- Collect data about how schools, teachers, and students are interacting during this time of distance learning so that we can understand **which students might be falling behind due to school closures**
- Ensure that those children who are falling behind are provided with **extra instruction to make up for that gap**
- Ensure that vulnerable children and those who are living in communities with less access to technology **are given ways to stay up to speed**
- Ensure **every child has a laptop computer** or has reasonable access to one
- Ensure **every child has access to state-funded community wifi**
- **Invest in rural broadband access** and other distance learning opportunities
- **Provide training and support for parents and youth** to ensure proper use of computers and online platforms
- Develop a plan to **make up for lost instructional time** on an as-needed basis
- Ensure that school districts **provide adequate distance learning to vulnerable student populations**, such as students with disabilities, undocumented students, and homeless students

According to the latest available data from the U.S. Census Bureau,



only 74% of Louisianans had an internet subscription at home.

Black households in the state are about two times more likely than White households to lack an internet subscription or a computer.



Approximately 40% of children (more than 425,000 kids) in Louisiana schools receive free or reduced lunch.

We are seeing how essential school meal programs are to our communities, and the failure to provide school meals disproportionately harms Black and Brown children.

- School districts should automatically **enroll all eligible students in the Meals-to-You program**
- **Expand the types of feeding programs** we've seen during the pandemic to make them available during every school break
- **End school lunch shaming** through legislative action

Workers, Children & Families

Environmental Justice

- **The Governor should require all state executive branch agencies to:**
 - **Hold open all active comment periods at least 60 days** beyond the lifting of any National Emergencies and States of Emergency declared by him or the President in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - **Abstain from issuing and/or finalizing any new non-essential, proposed, or revised rules or regulations, or environmental permits,** until Emergency declarations responding to the COVID-19 pandemic have been lifted
- **Create more access for local businesses,** and particularly Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firms more specifically for coastal restoration projects
- **Strengthen air pollution and quality control standards and practices** in response to research showing that Louisiana is experiencing higher mortality rates during the pandemic likely due to our state's high air pollution rate
- The ongoing global oil price war has further exposed how Louisiana's economy is overly reliant on the oil and gas industry--**Louisiana needs to leverage our existing expertise to focus on renewable energy and water and disaster management**
- The effectiveness of such a transition should also include **brokering better deals for the people of Louisiana on tax-funded corporate incentives and subsidies**
- **Establish an Office of State Planning to coordinate land uses** at all levels of government and to set minimum guidelines for local planning efforts
- **Invest in public transit,** which would improve the environment and public health, while making it easier for low-wage earners to work and care for their family including



St. John the Baptist Parish, which lies in the heart of Louisiana's "Cancer Alley," has the highest death rate per capita of any county in the United States. Its neighbor, St. James Parish, has the fourth highest rate in the country. This is likely due to the already existing air pollution problems in these parishes.

Housing

This disaster should be seen as an opportunity to fix the broken housing system that has led to more than one-third of our state's families living in insecure conditions. It can also provide us a chance to address a homelessness problem that has long plagued our state and our country.

Evictions & Utilities

- The Governor should **impose an immediate statewide moratorium on eviction proceedings**
- The Governor should **impose an immediate statewide moratorium on utility shut-offs of any kind**, including water, gas, sewer, electricity, and internet, and restore utilities that have been shut off

Rental Assistance & Foreclosure Prevention

- All Louisiana public housing authorities (PHAs) must respond to every rental adjustment, include funds for utilities, and provide automatic hardship waivers so they can **fully subsidize the rents of tenants who have lost all income**
- The Louisiana Housing Corporation (LHC) should receive funding to manage a rental assistance program with all properties that have active Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) **to allow property owners to secure rental and utility assistance for their tenants, fund supportive services, and protective Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline staff**
- In exchange for the above point, **developers must agree to a ban on evictions** and make any market rate units available for housing insecure families for the next 12 months
- The state should coordinate with local municipalities to **create a rental assistance program for any renter, regardless of income**
- Louisiana municipalities should ensure that all rental assistance funds that come through their jurisdiction require **just-cause eviction protections, anti-retaliation protections, a 10-day right to cure, the elimination of the waiver to 5-day notice, and 30 days notice at the end of a lease**
- The state should ensure that **all rental payments are in line with Fair Market Rental** when covering 100% of the rental costs
- The state must **provide funding to homebuyer counseling agencies** so they can provide virtual counseling to homeowners to assist them in navigating their mortgage renegotiation



35%
of Louisianans
are housing insecure

Housing

Homeless Populations

- State and local governments should immediately **provide individual housing units, hotel rooms, or short-term rentals, per CDC guidance, for people experiencing homelessness--** whether they live in street encampments or sleep in homeless shelters--to convalesce or self-quarantine with food and other supports during the outbreak.
- The Louisiana Housing Corporation (LHC) should be granted funds from the CARE Act to **provide housing for the homeless to the parishes in Balance of State Continuum of Care**, including funding for hotel vouchers or short-term rentals and funds to manage their facilities including (management, maintenance, supportive services and protective Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for those frontline staff)
- **Provide support so that emergency shelters can remain open 24 hours a day** as a one-stop referral point to individual units.
- **Provide three meals a day to people who remain unhoused**
- **Provide 24-hour access to soap, hand sanitizer, water, showers, and restrooms** for the unhoused
- **Provide safe spaces for people with sensory processing disorders** in quarantine areas and not isolate the housing insecure or ill in state parks--detached or semi-detached short-term rental units should be used for homeless or housing insecure individuals who have contracted the novel coronavirus
- **Set up a referral system so social service providers with special needs clients** (opportunity youth, LGBTQ, people living with HIV/AIDS, formerly incarcerated, people with mental illness and people with disabilities) so they can connect their clients to housing opportunities

Federal Action

- Congress should **provide for a major expansion of Housing Choice Vouchers** and/or create a targeted renters' tax credit to help families keep more of their incomes for other essentials like food, medicine, education, and transportation
- Congress should **increase investments in the National Housing Trust Fund**
- Congress should **enact legislation to create an emergency assistance fund**, like the one proposed by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Rob Portman (R-OH) in the [bipartisan Eviction Crisis Act](#), to provide short-term financial assistance and housing stabilization services
- **Impose immediate nationwide moratorium on foreclosure proceedings**--Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have required their servicers to offer forbearance or deferment, but the homeowner must still request assistance
- Pass [Sen. Sherrod Brown's bill](#) to **offer forbearances and extensions of mortgage loans** and guarantee that all mortgages will allow borrowers to put their payments at the end of the loan--extending it up to 12 months.
- All borrowers (commercial and residential) should be afforded the **ability to refinance their loan at lower interest rates**
- The Federal Reserve should be requiring that lenders access the 0% capital they are offering and **create products that would help homeowners, developers, churches and small businesses** who were struggling before the COVID-19 pandemic
- Congress should **provide \$15.5 billion in Emergency Solutions Grants for homeless service providers**, as per the [NLIHC recommendations](#)

More than 3000 people experienced homelessness in Louisiana in 2018

Criminal Legal System

If we ignore the burgeoning public health crisis in our jails and prisons, we will not only be responsible for unnecessary suffering and death, we will also be making it much harder to control this pandemic in the unincarcerated world. We need an all-hands-on-deck approach to averting a humanitarian disaster in our state's incarceration facilities.

Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the world. If this was justice, we would also have the lowest crime rates in the U.S. (or the world). Instead, we have had the highest murder rate in the U.S. for 30 consecutive years.

Immediate Needs

- Grant 180 days good time to allow **everyone within six months of release to get home**
- **Release everyone over the age of 60**
- **Issue medical parole** for pregnant women, anyone with respiratory conditions, and anyone who is otherwise immunocompromised
- **Abstain from arresting people** for technical parole violations, ordinance violations, misdemeanors, and non-serious felonies
- **Abstain from using solitary confinement and lockdown** as methods for quarantine and medical isolation
- Ensure that those who are arrested for more serious felonies are **held in locations where they do not have to share toilets, soap, utensils, or bedding**
- **Extensive and immediate use by the Governor of his powers of executive pardon, commutation, and clemency**, as well as providing DOC with broad authority to release as many prisoners as possible
- Issuance by the Louisiana Supreme Court of an order to **immediately release all pre-trial detainees** and other classes of individuals who pose no threat to public safety
- **Suspend all fines and fees that are required to be paid**, statutorily or otherwise, until the federal or Louisiana state of emergency is lifted
- **Provide masks and gloves to all staff and incarcerated people**
- **Create a jail and prison COVID-19 oversight commission** under the Office of Public Health and CDC, with the power to interview sick people, enforce basic medical standards, and ensure families have a right to know about the health of their loved ones
- **Provide universal access to screenings and treatment**, regardless of immigration status
- **Temporarily suspend in-person probation and parole (P&P) visits** and/or move to a video check-in system
- **Provide appropriate protective gear to all police officers** and ensure that all police vehicles are properly sanitized
- **Ensure materials related to COVID-19 are accessible in multiple languages**
- **Suspend halfway houses**
- Allow attorneys and other service providers to **schedule phone or video visitation with their clients** before they are released from incarceration
- Allow all attorneys to have **confidential non-recorded phone and/or video calls with their clients**
- **Allow for immediate public and courtwatcher access to all court proceedings** conducted by video or phone in Criminal District Court, Magistrate Court, and Municipal Court
- Allow families and friends of incarcerated people to **visit with families via video**, free of charge
- **Lift the suspension of in-person visits as soon as is medically feasible** to prevent the further spread of COVID-19
- **Set aside mental health funding** to ensure that people who struggle with mental health are not caught up in the criminal legal system
- **Create a public health oversight commission for prisons and jails**, with external health professionals (NOT DOC or jail medical personnel) who have immediate and unencumbered access to facilities
- **Make unemployment insurance or some other cash-based stopgap available to recently released people** who are not otherwise able to qualify for unemployment due to their lack of a base year for determining payment
- **Ensure medical isolation methods are not punitive**, and halt use of lockdowns and solitary, to ensure incarcerated people are motivated to report virus symptoms and maintain phone connections with their families
- **Reduce challenges to re-entry** by those who recently engaged in prison labor by ensuring they are guaranteed the weekly minimum under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program

Criminal Legal System

Juvenile Justice

- **Abstain from arresting children for misdemeanors** and non-serious offenses
- If an arrest must be made, **take full advantage of the counsel and release option** available under Louisiana Children's Code Article 814
- **Children who are arrested should be released to their parents or guardians** unless there is clear and compelling evidence this cannot be done safely
- If supervision is required, **utilize home supervision programs** instead of detention
- Jurisdictions preparing for the implementation of Act 147 (2020) should **begin enacting detention screening practices now**
- If no screening process is in place, **judges should review each case on an individual basis** before any child is detained
- **No child should be detained for a misdemeanor**, technical violation, or non-serious felony
- **Courts must continue to hold continued custody hearings**, even if other court operations are suspended, and should be held on the same day the child is arrested, or as soon as possible
- **Judges should exercise their authority to release detained children** without a continued custody hearing
- **Judges should review the list of the children that they have ordered into detention** and identify those who may be suitable for release daily
- Rural jurisdictions that do not hear juvenile cases regularly, in particular, must take steps to **speed up case processing**
- **No child should remain in jail solely based on their inability to pay bail**
- If any children are ordered into OJJ custody, **OJJ should not place them in a secure care facility**
- OJJ should **file motions for early release for any child with non-violent charges** and/or with less than a year remaining in their sentence, and seek furloughs for any additional children who are eligible
- District Attorneys should not oppose, or they should join with, OJJ and defenders in filing motions to modify and furlough requests
- Judges should **order the release of all children in OJJ custody with non-serious felony charges** and any children with less than a year remaining in their sentences
- **Facilities must reduce the risk of exposure without compromising children's safety or rights, by:**
 - **Allowing children to have frequent contact with their family members—electronically or via phone—at no charge and without limitation**
 - **Providing quality soap, CDC-recommended hand sanitizer, comprehensive sanitation of facilities**, and quality medical care free of charge
 - Ensuring that **children in custody have the same access to remote learning materials** as children in the community
 - Ensuring **children can speak with their legal teams confidentially** over the phone
 - **Developing and implementing protocols to avoid spread of the virus that do not rely on isolation.**
 - **Room confinement and unit lockdowns should not be used to quarantine children** or to manage understaffing
- The Governor should issue an emergency executive order **suspending the imposition and collection of administrative fees in the juvenile justice system.** Specifically, he should:
 - Order the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, and all courts with jurisdiction over delinquency cases to **suspend immediately the imposition and collection of all administrative fees, costs, and taxes related to juvenile delinquency cases** until at least December 31st, 2020
 - **Order the full discharge of all outstanding debts** related to juvenile administrative fees, costs, and taxes
 - Order the immediate cessation of all new referrals of outstanding juvenile administrative fees, costs, and taxes to the Department of Revenue.
 - Order the Department of Revenue to suspend all tax intercepts, bank levies, and wage garnishments for outstanding juvenile administrative fees, costs, and taxes

Criminal Legal System

Immigrant Detainees

- **Release ICE detainees from local jails and state prisons**
- State and local governments should **declare a moratorium on ICE enforcement actions** during the pandemic, as has happened during hurricanes
- **Provide universal access to screenings and treatment**, regardless of immigration status

Louisiana is currently holding more ICE detainees per capita than any other state in the U.S.

State Budget

The pandemic will create an enormous hole in Louisiana's budget, as it will in every state's budget. After the 2008 financial crash, most states took an austerity approach. That approach didn't accomplish its stated goals, and it led to both immediate and long-term harm, especially for vulnerable communities. This time, the federal government must make states whole, and we must ensure that aid goes directly to the people who need it, so we can rebuild our economy from the ground-up. We also need to:

According to Moody's Analytics, Louisiana is one of the worst prepared states to deal with an economic recession.

- **Adjust the current-year (2019-20) budget** to reflect a drastic drop in revenue, some of which will be offset with federal funding
- **Wait as long as possible to pass the state budget** (must be done by June 30) because the revenue forecast is going to change drastically
- **Take a balanced approach** to resolving any shortfalls or deficits that result from this recession that includes new revenues along with any cuts
- **It is critical to not repeat the mistakes of the last recovery**-e.g., when higher education was slashed dramatically and costs were pushed from the state to students and families
- **Prioritize education and training programs** that help people who want to transition to new careers by keeping programs affordable
- **Reprioritize the TANF block grant** to ensure that more money is going to cash assistance for families with children who are in financial need (Louisiana currently has the worst TANF-to-poverty ratio in the country, with just 4% of families in need receiving assistance)

Protect Democracy

This pandemic not only threatens our public health and well-being, it threatens our entire way of life, especially our democracy. We must make sure that our elections and the entirety of our democratic system are upheld and even strengthened during this crisis. It's also important to note that a full and proper count in the 2020 Census is more important than ever, since the Census will determine how much money Louisiana receives from the federal government to recover from this disaster.

Voting

- **Expand Early Voting times by at least one week** and authorizing parishes to establish additional in-person Early Voting sites
- **Expand voting by mail to every Louisianan**
- **Mail absentee ballot applications to every registered voter**
- **Permit all registered voters to request an absentee ballot** from their county election official over the phone or via email
- **Allow any voter or their designee to drop off their absentee ballot at any polling place or in secure drop boxes at accessible locations**
- Allow any person designated by the voter (including staff of nursing homes and senior centers if the voter resides in these facilities) to pick up the voter's absentee ballot and drop that absentee ballot off by the close of polls on Election Day
- **Make absentee ballots available until Election Day, and accept absentee ballots postmarked by Election Day** and received within 10 days of Election Day, or received in office on Election Day if submitted in person
- **Make curbside voting available to any voter** unable or unwilling to enter the polling place on Election Day due to COVID-19 concerns
- **Anticipate that absentee ballot utilization will increase dramatically during the 2020 election cycle**, even without the adoption of no-excuse absentee balloting
- To address higher voting-by-mail volume, **allow early processing of ballots before Election Day**
- **Recruit additional staff** to process this larger quantity of absentee ballots, and communicate with the public and news media that a larger quantity of absentee ballots could lead to delays in reporting vote totals
- **Provide voters notice and an opportunity to address and cure issues with absentee ballots** by adopting policies and practices that provide voters with timely notice of signature mismatches and other technical defects on their ballots/ballot envelopes, along with an opportunity to cure those defects remotely
- **Undertake extensive voter education** to ensure voters know how to vote during the coronavirus epidemic
- **Ensure healthy, clean, safe polling locations** (e.g., deep cleaning, demarcate six-foot spacing)
- **Train poll workers on sanitary measures**
- Actively **communicate all health and safety measures to voters** so they feel comfortable and confident going to the polls



VOTE

Protect Democracy



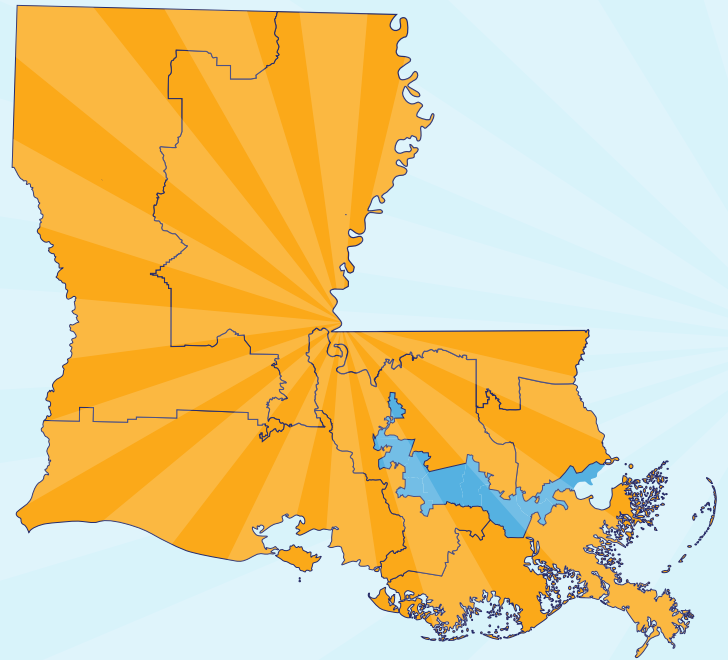
2020 Census

- **Continue delaying the final response date until we can be reasonably sure we'll be able to get a full count**
- **Develop and implement a plan to effectively reach and properly count traditionally hard-to-count communities**, who are less likely to have reliable internet access, making them even harder to reach with an all-digital or mostly digital outreach strategy

Louisiana has one of the highest proportions of hard-to-count communities in the U.S.

Redistricting

- **Establish a non-binding redistricting study** and advisory commission either through legislation ([House Bill 623](#)) or Executive Order
- **Create a redistricting transparency website** either through legislation ([House Bill 565](#)) or Executive Order
- **End prison gerrymandering** either through legislation ([House Bill 625](#)) or Executive Order



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List of Signatories

These policy demands and ideas are the product of dozens of advocacy groups working together. We represent expertise across many different issue areas, and all of the ideas put forward here are solutions that come from our work with directly impacted people. This document is the result of our shared commitment to equitable, people-centered solutions.



CENTER for PLANNING EXCELLENCE



Daughters
Beyond
Incarceration



Louisiana
APPLESEED



Louisiana Center
for Children's Rights



Community, Education, Policy

ORLEANS
PUBLIC
EDUCATION
NETWORK



OXFAM



SPLC
Southern Poverty
Law Center



From Chains to Change



WOMEN
WITH A
VISION

