

POWERFUL POLICY DEMANDS to Respond to COVID-19



**Avoid a
Housing
Crisis**

Roadmap to RECOVERY

Immediate Needs

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.

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to expose the structural and systemic racism that plagues our society, particularly in Louisiana and the South. This has been the case for centuries, and was the result of thousands of decisions made by local, state, and federal authorities, in both the public and private sectors. Organizations and advocates, including the ones who are signed onto this document, have spent years trying to address those issues through policy and direct service, which is why we are in the best position to speak to them now.

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**



www.PowerCoalition.org

Avoid a Housing Crisis

In Louisiana, 35% of households are burdened by housing costs, and this number doubles in larger metro areas. Guidance on housing issues from the Governor and mayors hasn't gone far enough to ensure people can stay safely and affordably housed. We are calling for these immediate solutions:

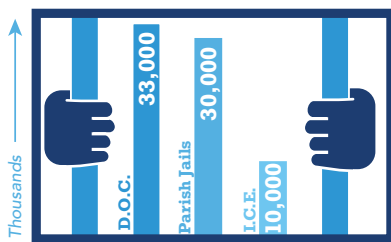
- **The Governor needs to extend the limited eviction and foreclosure protections in the CARES Act to everyone statewide until people are allowed to return to work**
- **Give landlords relief by addressing mortgage and property tax escrow issues, and mortgage payments (residential and commercial) must be deferred until the end of the loan**
- **Utility companies must halt all shut-offs (water, gas, electric, phone, and internet)**
- **Give the unhoused access to unfilled hotels and private housing units through state subsidies**
- **Provide immediate rental and utility assistance**
- **Put housing authority voucher families into vacant homes**



35%
of Louisianans
are burdened
by housing
costs

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

The public health issues we are currently facing are multiplied exponentially in jails and prisons, putting the lives of thousands of people at immediate and unnecessary risk. Without the measures laid out below, we will potentially be turning short jail sentences, or people's inability to pay bail, or a host of other offenses, into death sentences. Allowing the pandemic to fester in our jails and prisons will also give the virus room to boomerang back into the general population even after we eventually get it under control.



33,000
Department of
Corrections

30,000
Parish Jails

10,000
ICE detention
centers


- **Grant 180 days good time to allow everyone within six months of their release date to return 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 ordinance violations, misdemeanors, and non-serious felonies**
- **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.**
- **Release ICE detainees in local jails and state prisons**
- **State and local governments should declare a moratorium on ICE enforcement actions during the pandemic, as they have done during hurricanes and other disasters**

Protect Workers, Children & Families

Approximately 250,000 unemployment claims were filed in Louisiana in the first few weeks of the pandemic's spread, and we know our most vulnerable workers and families will be hit the hardest by the resulting economic fallout. Many workers don't earn enough to save up for a crisis, aren't offered paid sick leave, and don't have access to affordable healthcare. As we're clearly seeing during this crisis, these are essential workers. We should treat them that way.

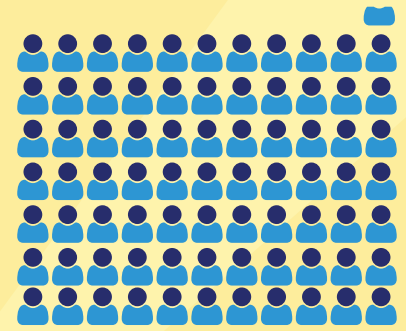
- **Governor Edwards should use his emergency powers to enact statewide paid sick leave or give local governments the ability to enact local paid family and sick leave policies (they are currently banned from doing so)**
- **Raise the state minimum wage and/or give local governments the freedom to raise local wage floors so more workers will have the means to fuel local economies and combat the impact of this recession**
- **Expand access to unemployment insurance so that workers can receive the maximum benefits under Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)**
- **Provide grants and small business loans to child care providers who have closed their businesses or suffered financial losses during the pandemic**
- **Immediately apply for a waiver to remove the five-year waiting period for lawfully residing immigrant children to become eligible for Medicaid**
- **Ensure full equity, especially racial equity, during school closures by collecting data about how schools, teachers, and students are interacting during this time of distance learning, and providing children who are falling behind with extra instruction to make up for that gap**

Average
UNEMPLOYMENT
Calls Per Day

 = 100 calls

BEFORE COVID-19
250

AFTER COVID-19
7,750



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 most so we can rebuild our economy from the ground-up. We need to start by:

- **Waiting as long as possible to pass a state budget (must be done by June 30) because the revenue forecast is going to change drastically**
- **Taking a balanced approach to resolving any shortfalls or deficits that result from this recession by including new revenues along with any cuts**
- **Reprioritize the TANF block grant to ensure that more money is going to cash assistance for families with children who are in financial need**

Protect Democracy

In times of crisis, we need to be more vigilant about our democratic rights than ever. These existing legislative instruments and/or possible executive orders can address potential threats to the democratic process:



- **The Governor should use his emergency powers to expand Early Voting times by at least one week and add more Early Voting poll locations**
- **Expand voting by mail to every Louisianan either through legislation ([House Bill 419](#)) or order of the Governor**
- **Take steps to ensure healthy, clean, safe polling locations, and actively communicate those measures to the public**
- **Establish a non-binding redistricting study and advisory commission ([House Bill 623](#))**
- **Create a redistricting transparency website ([House Bill 565](#))**