

Mississippi House of Representatives



March 30, 2020

The Honorable Tate Reeves
Governor of Mississippi
P.O. Box 139
Jackson, MS 39205

RE: Steps the Reeves Administration Must Take to Ensure Federal Legislation Can Assist Mississippi Families with the Costs of Health Care, Child Care, and Groceries.

Dear Governor Reeves:

As you and our state health officials have stated, Mississippians must, to the extent possible, stay at home in order to slow the spread of COVID-19 and avoid overwhelming our health care system. We know that thousands of our constituents are now unable to work. They are grappling with dueling fears, at once concerned about the virus' increasing death toll and putting food on the table.

Elected officials are asking our friends, families and neighbors to make a huge sacrifice. In kind, state leaders must do everything they can to lessen the financial burden on Mississippians.

Newly enacted federal legislation can provide greater assistance to Mississippi families. However, states must take certain actions in order to unlock opportunities in the Families First Act (2020) and CARES Act (2020) to assist Mississippians with the costs of childcare, health care and groceries.

We hope that your administration is taking the needed steps to extend these resources to every eligible individual and family in our state. If not, we implore you to immediately put your administration to work easing the burden on hard-hit Mississippians.

Below is a list of immediate, urgent policy recommendations that can help Mississippians struggling with economic hardship afford basic necessities like childcare and food during this public health emergency.

Child Care

The CARES Act provides an additional \$46 million in emergency funding to cover child care through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). *Governor, we ask that you direct your DHS establish emergency childcare assistance programs to health care sector*

employees, emergency responders, sanitation workers, and other workers deemed essential during the response to COVID-19. In addition, your administration should continue payments and assistance to childcare providers in the case of decreased enrollment or closures related to COVID-19. These are small businesses with small margins. Workers are going to need them when our economy reopens. Essential employees need them now. CCDBG and TANF funds are available to keep them open.

Health Care

Medicaid can now cover the cost of COVID-19 testing for the uninsured. The Families First Act allows states to establish a new coverage option for uninsured Mississippians in need of COVID-19 testing. *Governor, please direct the Division of Medicaid to submit a state plan amendment to make this testing coverage available to our state's uninsured. Costs should not be a barrier to testing.* Our health care providers are fighting COVID-19 while facing financial shortfalls. Medicaid can provide greater coverage to the uninsured while extending another line of reimbursement to rural hospitals and community health centers—a critical measure as COVID-19 continues to spread in our state.

The Families First Act provides Mississippi with additional Medicaid funding. Each state can receive an additional 6.2 percent increase in its federal Medicaid match rate. For Mississippi, that means an additional \$380 million that should go to covering health care costs. To receive this match, Mississippi is required to end all redetermination efforts that have led to thousands of children losing health insurance over the past two years.

Food & Nutritional Assistance

The Families First Act authorizes emergency SNAP benefits, called Pandemic EBT, for families with children out of school due to the COVID-19 emergency who would ordinarily receive free and reduced-price lunch. While schools are closed under this COVID-19 emergency, families with a child that qualifies for free or reduced lunch may receive heightened SNAP benefits. These new benefits are at no cost to the state. *Governor, your administration must work with state education leaders and school districts to identify and provide EBT food replacement benefits to low-income families not currently receiving SNAP.*

The Families First Act gives states additional flexibility to provide increased SNAP benefits. *Your administration can now request a waiver from USDA to provide temporary, emergency SNAP benefits to SNAP households (up to the maximum monthly benefit amount).* These emergency benefits will assist with temporary food needs. States are also allowed to waive administrative and reporting requirements. The Act anticipates states having staffing difficulties and office closures during this emergency period and provides needed flexibility.

The Families First Act ensures SNAP availability to for Jobless Workers. Starting, April 1, the Act suspends work requirements for SNAP benefits and also suspends time limits on SNAP benefits. *Governor, your administration should immediately suspend all adverse actions and renewals for current SNAP households and minimize paperwork requirements.*

Governor, we hope your administration is well underway in extending these resources. The undersigned members, and we suspect the full legislature, is ready and willing to assist in any way we can.

Sincerely,

Robert Johnson III
Mississippi House District 94
Minority Leader

Shanda Yates
Mississippi House District 64
Dep. Minority Leader

Jeramey Anderson
Mississippi House District 110

Earle Banks
Mississippi House District 67

Chris Bell
Mississippi House District 65

William (Bo) Brown
Mississippi House District 70

Bryant Clark
Mississippi House District 47

Oscar Denton
Mississippi House District 55

Jarvis Dortch
Mississippi House District 66

John Faulkner
Mississippi House District 5

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Mississippi House District 72

Jeffery Harness
Mississippi House District 85

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Mississippi House District 50

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Mississippi House District 11

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