The COVID-19 crisis is exposing glaring inequities that exist in our cities, our state and our nation. While the impacts of the current crisis are felt by everyone, it’s no surprise that the most economically vulnerable members of our communities – Black and Brown, women – are being hit the hardest. POWER-PAC IL is fighting for our families whose lives are that much harder in the short term and who face real harm and instability over the long-run because of this global pandemic.

As our country works to address the COVID-19 fallout, we call for families to have a meaningful seat at the table (even when those tables are virtual) and to be engaged as full partners in developing short-term relief measures as well as long-term solutions that reduce disparities so that all families can succeed. Both the pandemic and the resulting global economic crisis are showing just how interdependent and interconnected we all are. Our collective well-being depends on all of us being safe, healthy, and able to thrive.

GUIDING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES FOR BOLD ACTION

We call on our local, state and federal government to enact bold solutions guided by these principles:

1. Economic security:
   - Basic needs: Provide direct cash relief and expand access to benefit and safety net programs so all economically vulnerable families, regardless of immigration or employment status, can meet basic needs.
   - Housing and utilities: Extend the suspension on evictions and foreclosures, expand access to rent assistance, and ensure that essential utility services remain available to all residents during the pandemic and after emergency orders are lifted.
   - Worker protections: Protect the health and safety of all workers, provide unemployment insurance to all who have lost work and paid leave for all workers, and ensure childcare remains available and affordable to those who need it.
   - Fines and fees: Suspend government fines and fees, ban the collection of debts through garnishments and other means, pause interest accrual and allow people to hold off on payments without penalties; end driver’s license suspensions for all reasons other than public safety.

2. Education access: Ensure that all children can fully participate in remote learning by addressing language and technology barriers, protecting the rights of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, and ensuring that all families have the tools and support they need for distance learning.

3. Food security: Provide food assistance for all families who need it, including immigrant families least likely to access public benefits, through grocery vouchers, expanding SNAP benefits, continued school-based food distribution, mobile food delivery, and other means.

4. Healthcare: Ensure access to free testing and medical care for COVID-19 and related health issues for all Illinois residents regardless of income, insurance or immigration status.
IMMEDIATE RELIEF RECOMMENDATIONS AND LONG-TERM CALL TO ACTION

Right now, POWER-PAC IL parents across the state are advocating for these specific policies that reflect the principles of the “Fighting for Our Families” Platform. These include immediate relief for families and longer-term solutions to address systemic inequities.

Some needed policy changes that we are currently working on include:

- **Fill the gaps in federal relief:** We are working with partners to advocate for state-level financial relief measures to protect the economic security of Illinois residents who are left out of the federal stimulus, including households with undocumented members, ITIN filers, and those who are unbanked or don’t file taxes.

- **Protect utility access:** We are advocating with the Illinois Commerce Commission and the State to order utilities to create more flexible and uniform credit and collections protections, reconnect all customers, waive late fees and penalties, and provide more flexible and affordable deferred payment arrangements.

- **End government fees and fines:** We successfully got the City of Chicago to suspend many municipal fees and fines during the crisis and we are now working with allies to expand this effort and see it adopted statewide to reduce, cap or forgive government fees and fines, especially for those experiencing financial hardship, and end the practice of suspending driver's licenses to collect public debts or for failure to appear in court.

- **Boost SNAP benefits:** We are pushing the state to increase SNAP benefit amounts, expand eligibility guidelines, speed up applications and renewals, and suspend work requirements, sanctions, and time limits.

- **Close the digital divide and guarantee the rights of special ed and ELL students:** We are pushing school districts and state and local governments to ensure equitable access to e-learning by providing computers and internet access for all students who don’t currently have them and reaching out with needed resources for students with IEP’s and English Language Learners. We also call on the federal government to support universal broadband access.

- **Improve the next federal relief package:** With our state and national allies, we are working to ensure the next federal stimulus package addresses the limitations in the previous packages, including:
  - More resources to support state and local governments
  - More and ongoing direct cash payments until the economy recovers; using debit cards to ensure families receive the payments quickly and easily
  - Enabling voting rights and vote-by-mail in every state

- **Pass the Fair Tax referendum in November/assure safe access to voting and mail-in balloting in Illinois:** We are working with allies across the state to pass the Fair Tax referendum to amend the Illinois Constitution and reform Illinois’ tax code to allow for a graduated state income tax. We call on officials to assure that all Illinois voters have safe access to the election next fall by expanding Mail-In Voting. The Fair Tax will ensure the state has sustainable resources to weather the aftermath of the current crisis while combating economic inequality by making sure those who can most afford it, the wealthy, *pay their fair share*.

POWER-PAC IL is an organization of parent leaders from across Illinois and is staff supported by Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)