April 9, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, Schumer, and McCarthy,

The 157 undersigned organizations, representing millions of patients and consumers from across America, urge Congress to expand eligibility for the paid family and medical leave program to include individuals determined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to be at high risk for adverse complications from COVID-19 and working members of their households. This policy will allow those at highest risk to remain home for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and will help ensure their health and safety.

Currently, paid family medical leave provides support only to those with children or adults with disabilities whose local school district or usual care providers are closed due to the pandemic. This policy does not go far enough. The hardworking Americans who have been advised by the CDC to remain home are only eligible for up to two weeks of financial support and job protection of expanded paid sick leave. This places individuals who live with significant health conditions such as cystic fibrosis, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, organ transplants, sickle cell and others with a devastating choice: place their health or their loved one’s health at risk by going back to work or lose their jobs altogether. Additionally, adults living with family members who are immunocompromised also need access to this support to help protect these vulnerable Americans.

At this time of great uncertainty in our country, it is important to understand that certain individuals are at much higher risk of adverse health events and death associated with COVID-19 than the rest of the population. Although recent research indicates the overall fatality rate from COVID-19 is around 2 percent, individuals with certain health conditions experience a greater rate of severe complications and have higher fatality rates from COVID-19. Research performed by the European Respiratory Society found that:

- patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) have a 25 percent fatality rate
- patients with diabetes have a 10 percent fatality rate
- patients with hypertension have a 10.4 percent fatality rate
- patients with cerebrovascular disease have a 20 percent fatality rate

Further, researchers at Johns Hopkins University have found that patients with cancer have a 5.6 percent fatality rate and those with cardiovascular disease have a 10.5 percent fatality rate.

These very startling statistics demonstrate why individuals with serious health conditions and other risk factors, as identified by the CDC, and working members of their household should receive job protection...
and financial support through paid family leave. We call on Congress to make the following changes to the paid family and medical leave program created in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act:

- Expand eligibility for paid family leave to include anyone who, because of a serious health condition that places them at grave risk from COVID-19, has been advised by their physician to remain home

- Expand eligibility for paid family leave or additional financial support to include anyone who has been advised by a physician to remain home because there is a member of their household who has a serious health condition that places them at grave risk from COVID-19

- Remove the arbitrary time limit on paid leave to ensure that these individuals can remain home as long as the COVID-19 pandemic poses a risk to their health and wellbeing

- Ensure this program applies to employers of all sizes

In this extremely uncertain time for our country, we believe Congress can come together to provide some certainty for Americans who are afraid that their health or the health of a loved one will be placed at risk should they continue to work. We urge Congress to act swiftly to enact these changes.

Sincerely,

Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
Academy of Oncology Nurse and Patient Navigators
ACCSS
Allergy & Asthma Network
ALS Association
Alstrom Syndrome International
American Association on Health and Disability
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association
American Diabetes Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Kidney Fund
American Liver Foundation
Angioma Alliance
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
Association of Oncology Social Work (AOSW)
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autistic Women and Nonbinary Network
Axis Advocacy
Beyond Type 1
Brain Injury Association of America
Bridge the Gap - SYNGAP Education and Research Foundation
California Access Coalition
California Chronic Care Coalition
Dystonia Medical Research Foundation
Caregiver Action Network
CARES Foundation Inc.
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Children’s Cancer Cause
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Chronic Care Policy Alliance
Chronic Disease Coalition
Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation
CommunicationFIRST
Congenital Hyperinsulinism International
COPD Foundation
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation
Cure HHT
Cure SMA
CureDuchenne
Cystic Fibrosis Research, Inc. (CFRI)
Danielle Byron Henry Migraine Foundation
Davis Phinney Foundation
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Diabetes Patient Advocacy Coalition (DPAC)
Disability Rights California
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Dystonia Advocacy Network
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
The Migraine Diva
The Sickle Cell Disease Association of America, Inc
Tourette Association of America
Transplant Recipients International Organization (TRIO)
Transplant Support Organization
Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance
United Cerebral Palsy National
United for Charitable Assistance
United Spinal Association
United States International Council on Disabilities
US Hereditary Angioedema Association
VetsFirst
VHL Alliance
Whistleblowers of America
WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease
ZERO - The End of Prostate Cancer

1 https://erj.ersjournals.com/content/early/2020/03/17/13993003.00547-2020.figures-only