



Pandemic Relief Plan for Nebraska Communities

We need to ensure that every Nebraskan has what they need to be safe and healthy. We're calling on elected officials to deploy every policy tool at their disposal to protect access to food and shelter, and to provide financial support to families in crisis. Nebraska received \$1.085 billion in Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) through the CARES Act, which is designed to provide direct fiscal relief to state and local governments for responses related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nebraska leaders should prioritize the use of CRF for providing direct relief to Nebraskans, and to maximize other funding sources by building on existing programs.

The effects of the pandemic are widespread, but its health and economic impacts have fallen hardest on Nebraskans of color. The coronavirus has already claimed the lives of nearly 300 Nebraskans, but Latinx, Asian, and Black Nebraskans are being hospitalized and dying at significantly higher rates. Communities and families are faced with urgent and mounting threats to their physical well-being today: 1 in 2 Black Nebraskans and 1 in 3 Latinx Nebraskans are concerned about being able to afford next month's rent, compared to 1 in 8 White Nebraskans.ⁱ The disparities reflect broader historical barriers to health care, safe and stable jobs, and financial stability for people of color.

We all benefit when we enact policies targeted to the Nebraskans most impacted by the crisis. People are what makes our state's economy run, and there is no economic recovery that does not center the people most affected by the pandemic. The choices that Nebraska lawmakers make now, and the choices they fail to make, will have consequences for years to come. This list includes provisions that should be implemented as soon as possible—either by executive action or through the leadership of the Legislature when they convene to complete the 2020 legislative session.

1. Ensure access to food for low-income families

- a. Extend the emergency allotment to SNAP households for the duration of the emergency.ⁱⁱ
- b. Use CRF to pay for administrative costs for a temporary expansion of access to food assistance through SNAP by increasing gross income eligibility to 185% of the FPL.ⁱⁱⁱ
- c. Extend SNAP eligibility recertification period permanently from 6 months to 12 months.^{iv}

2. Support housing stability for Nebraska families and communities

- a. Create a sustainable program for emergency rent and utility assistance and suspend the accumulation of late fees and penalties during the state of emergency for COVID-19.
- b. Provide authority to cities and municipalities to institute eviction moratoriums during a state or national emergency.

- c. Require plaintiffs in eviction proceedings to submit an affidavit that the property is not subject to federal CARES Act provisions.^v
 - d. Prohibit housing discrimination based on lawful source of income.^{vi}
- 3. Stimulate the economy by investing in Nebraska families**
- a. Temporarily increase benefits to families receiving Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Nebraska has an estimated \$80 million in federal TANF rainy day funds that it should immediately utilize to help families address the ongoing crisis.
 - b. Provide temporary emergency assistance to non-ADC families in crisis using federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) rainy day funds.
- 4. Ensure access to child care for low-income parents returning to work**
- a. Use CRF to temporarily expand access to child care assistance for more low-income families and to support consistent revenue for child care providers.
 - i. Increase initial eligibility to 185% of the FPL to support access to child care for more families, which also supports more business for child care providers.^{vii}
 - ii. Increase transitional eligibility level to 200% of the FPL, to ensure that families can better afford child care on their own before they lose assistance.^{viii}
 - b. Temporarily waive co-pay requirements in child care subsidy programs to support low-income families struggling to make ends meet, to provide consistency in payment for child care providers, and to reduce the administrative burden for DHHS.^{ix}
 - c. Provide child care assistance to essential workers up to 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL).^x
 - d. Create and distribute grants for child care programs to meet the needs of young school-age children who are not in school full-time, paid for by CRF or TANF Rainy Day.
 - e. Make permanent [Executive Order Number 20 - 18](#) to pay child care providers for subsidy enrollees for absences.
 - f. Supplement Emergency Paid Family Leave provisions in federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) by offering such paid leave to more employees, increasing the wage reimbursement rate for low-income workers, and reimbursing employers for leave wages using Coronavirus Relief Funds.
- 5. Strengthen health and safety protections for workers**
- a. Create a state emergency paid sick and family leave program that allows all workers to take time off to care for themselves or their dependents during a public health emergency - to fill in the gaps left by the federal leave provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (FFCRA).^{xi}
 - b. Exempt work authorized immigrants (ex: DACA/TPS) from eligibility restrictions.^{xii}
 - c. Expand good cause exceptions for leaving work to include leaving a job to care for a child, parent or spouse or leaving a job due to a lack of protective health measures/illness.

For questions or to learn more about these proposals, you can contact:

- **Nebraska Appleseed:** James Goddard - jgoddard@neappleseed.org
- **Voices for Children in Nebraska:** Julia Isaacs Tse - jtse@voicesforchildren.com
- **Women's Fund of Omaha:** Tiffany Seibert Joekel - tjoekel@omahawomensfund.org

ⁱ Voices for Children in Nebraska, *COVID-19 Data Hub*, <https://voicesforchildren.com/datahub>.

ⁱⁱ DHHS requested and received approval for a waiver to provide emergency allotments to SNAP households through the month of June, but will need to reapply for households to receive emergency benefits monthly. U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Nebraska: Emergency Allotments Extension,” April 21, 2020, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/NE-SNAP-COV-EmergencyAllotmentsExtension2-Acknowledged.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Already introduced and heard in LB 255 (McCollister). On General File.

^{iv} NE DHHS has temporarily extended certification periods from 6 months to 12 months for households scheduled to expire in March, April and May. Letter from Sasha Gersten-Paal, USDA to Stephanie Beasley, NE DHHS, April 1, 2020, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/NE%20-%20SNAP%20-%20COV-060%20-%20Extend%20Cert%20Periods%20-%20Approval.pdf>.

^v CARES Act requires a temporary moratorium on evictions for most residents of federally subsidized apartments, as well as a moratorium on filings for evictions for renters in homes covered by federally-backed mortgages through July 24, 2020; National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Eviction and Foreclosure Moratoriums,” Accessed May 4, 2020, <https://nlihc.org/eviction-and-foreclosure-moratoriums>.

^{vi} Already introduced and heard in LB 1020 (Vargas). Remains in Judiciary Committee.

^{vii} Already introduced and heard in LB 1049 (Bolz). Remains in HHS Committee.

^{viii} Already introduced and heard in LB 329 (Bolz). On Select File.

^{ix} Federal guidance indicates that “Lead Agencies have the flexibility to determine which children qualify as receiving or needing to receive “protective services,” and could include families affected by COVID-19 circumstances in that definition as a temporary, short-term measure...For protective services cases, the Lead Agency has the option to waive the family co-payment (in accordance with 45 CFR 98.45(k)(4)).” US DHHS, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Child Care, “CCDF Frequently Asked Questions in Response to COVID-19,” published March 13, 2020, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-faqs-in-response-to-covid-19>.

^x US DHHS, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Child Care, “CCDF Frequently Asked Questions in Response to COVID-19,” published March 13, 2020, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-faqs-in-response-to-covid-19>.

^{xi} FFCRA leave provisions, details here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employer-paid-leave>.

^{xii} Will require changes to [4-109](#) and [4-111](#).