House Democrats have updated their Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act to address what they say are needs that have developed since the House passed its earlier version of H.R. 6800 on May 15, and to reflect negotiations between Democrats and Republicans.

The HEROES Act, which started out as a massive $3 trillion measure, has been trimmed to a $2.2 trillion bill that Democrats expect will protect lives, livelihoods, and the life of American democracy.

Need-based changes. Although the one-page summary and section-by-section description of the updated HEROES Act does not call out the changes made in the updated version, Democratic lawmakers highlighted these changes made in response to needs that have arisen since the House first acted:

- **Strong support for small businesses**, by improving the Paycheck Protection Program to serve the smallest businesses and struggling non-profits, providing hard-hit businesses with second loans, and delivering targeted assistance for the struggling restaurant industry and independent live-venue operators.
- **Additional assistance for airline industry workers**, extending the highly successful Payroll Support Program to keep airline industry workers paid.
- **More funds to bolster education and child care**, with $225 billion for education—including $182 billion for K-12 schools and nearly $39 billion for postsecondary education—and $57 billion to support child care for families.

Key priorities maintained. The updated HEROES Act maintains these key priorities, among others, from the earlier House-passed version of the bill:

- **Honors our heroes**, through $436 billion to provide one year’s worth of assistance to state, local, territorial, and tribal governments that desperately need funds to pay vital workers like first responders and health workers who keep us safe and are in danger of losing their jobs.
- **Supports testing, tracing, and treatment**, through $75 billion for coronavirus testing, contact tracing, and isolation measures, with special attention on the disparities facing communities of color, ensuring every American can access free coronavirus treatment, and supporting hospitals and providers. The updated bill also includes $28 billion for procurement, distribution and education campaigns for a safe and effective vaccine.
- **Provides additional direct payments**, cushioning the economic blow of the coronavirus crisis with a more robust second round of economic impact payments of $1,200 per taxpayer and $500 per dependent.
- **Protects payrolls**, by enhancing the new employee retention tax credit that encourages employers to keep employees on payroll.
- **Ensures worker safety**, by requiring OSHA to issue a strong, enforceable standard within seven days to require all workplaces to develop and implement infection control plans based on CDC expertise.
• **Preserves health coverage**, protecting Americans who are losing their employer-provided health insurance by making sure unemployed Americans automatically receive the maximum ACA subsidy on the exchanges, as well as a special enrollment period in the ACA exchanges for uninsured Americans.

• **Restores unemployment benefits**, ensuring weekly $600 federal unemployment payments through next January and preventing unemployed workers from exhausting their eligibility, providing a vital safety net for the record number of Americans who are unemployed, including those connected to the gig-economy.

**NELP applauds legislation.** The National Employment Law Project (NELP) quickly reacted to the news that the HEROES Act bill has been updated, saying: "It's long past the time for Congress and the administration to come together and pass a COVID-19 and recession relief bill that rises to the seriousness of the crisis we're in. Millions of people are out of work through no fault of their own. People's lives depend on it."

**Strong protections.** NELP strongly supports the provisions in the legislation that would require OSHA to finally issue an Emergency Temporary Standard to protect all workers from COVID-19, as well as those that "would provide much needed and long overdue support to unemployed workers and their families."

The worker advocacy organization also favored these key provisions in the HEROES Act:

• Allowing states to waive overpayments of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) in cases of equity and good conscience;

• Providing relief for ‘mixed-income’ earners who qualify for only small unemployment benefits because most of their income does not qualify them for unemployment; and

• Clarifying that caregivers are eligible for PUA even when a school or daycare closure is partial.

**State resources.** NELP also noted that the legislation would give states the resources they need to "meet this unprecedented challenge—for example, by extending funding of waiting weeks and interest-free loans for state unemployment trust funds."

**Systemic reform needed.** As NELP sees it, the COVID-19 pandemic "has shown in the starkest terms how desperately the entire unemployment compensation program needs systematic reform." According to NELP, that reform should be "centered on the Black and immigrant workers who are most often shut out of the system altogether due to decades of intentionally exclusionary policies that hinder us from equal access to labor rights and social programs."