



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

Eric Bunn Sr.
National Secretary-Treasurer

Dr. Everett B. Kelley
National President

Jeremy A. Lannan
NVP for Women & Fair Practices

February 25, 2021

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO, (AFGE) which represents more than 700,000 federal and District of Columbia employees who serve the American people in 70 different agencies, I write to urge your support for H.R. 1319, the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021,” a bill to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of S.Con.Res. 5. AFGE strongly supports relief for the American people and particularly federal and D.C. government workers who have been on the frontlines battling the Coronavirus Pandemic. To this end, we particularly highlight three provisions of the bill: emergency paid leave, presumption of worksite illness for COVID-19 for all federal employees and raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

We strongly support providing emergency paid leave for all federal workers. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provided federal employees with two weeks of emergency paid leave to use if they contracted COVID-19, were exposed to the virus, or needed to care for loved ones. That leave expired on December 31, 2020, but the need for the leave has grown as the virus continues to spread and many public schools and childcare centers are not open. Workers are being exposed to the virus on the job in greater numbers and they should not have to face the risk of taking time off without pay to quarantine or convalesce. The federal government should be a model employer, lead by example, and provide emergency paid leave to all federal workers during the current pandemic.

AFGE strongly supports a presumption of worksite illness through the Federal Employee Compensation Act (FECA) for COVID-19. This expansion of eligibility for workers’ compensation would apply to all federal workers who are required to report for duty and interact with the public, and thereby contract COVID-19. A presumption of workplace illness would allow federal employees to make a FECA claim without facing a potentially lengthy denial and appeals process. Many of our members have been unable to apply for FECA benefits within the 30-day required filing deadline as they are too sick with COVID-19, and as a result are denied benefits and pay. Employees who are hospitalized inevitably miss deadlines and lose benefits. A presumption of workplace illness will help ensure that these federal workers have access to timely FECA benefits during their illness and while addressing long-term health effects from COVID-19 contracted in the performance of their duties.

Among the workers who would be eligible for emergency paid leave and the presumption of worksite illness are support personnel at the Veterans Health Administration and Indian Health Service facilities, Transportation Security Officers exposed in airports, corrections officers employed in Bureau of Prisons facilities, law enforcement officers, federal firefighters, air traffic controllers, inspectors in meat and poultry plants, and numerous others serving the public on the frontlines.

AFGE also supports the bill's provision to raise the minimum wage for workers in America to \$15 an hour. Tens of thousands of federal and District of Columbia government workers are full time employees earning less than \$15 an hour. These are licensed practical nurses and canteen workers at VA hospitals, food service workers at Department of Defense (DoD) commissaries, and maintenance workers at our military bases. Higher wages mean better workforce morale and lower rates of poverty. Raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour will help lift the standard of living for federal and D.C. government workers and the millions of working Americans who are paid at or below the current minimum wage.

AFGE strongly urges your support for H.R. 1319, the "American Rescue Plan Act of 2021." For additional information or questions, please contact Fiona Kohrman, fiona.kohrman@afge.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alethea Predeoux". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alethea Predeoux
Director, Legislative and Political Mobilization
Department