



June 22, 2020

Hon. Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Kamala Harris
United States Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Feinstein and Harris:

The Writers Guild of America West (WGAW), which represents more than 10,000 writers of television, movies, news programs, documentaries and online video, urges you and your Senate colleagues to pass a version of the House of Representative's "Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions" (HEROES) Act. We need additional, comprehensive legislation to address the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on working people.

The HEROES Act contains critical provisions to help those experiencing the most devastating effects of the pandemic. This bold stimulus legislation would address frontline worker safety, keep state and local governments solvent and expand health insurance for workers. While earlier relief measures passed in response to Coronavirus have aided our members and many Americans, the Senate needs to do more to protect working people from both the immediate and long-term effects of this global health crisis and its financial and economic consequences. Any action the Senate takes must include the HEROES Act provisions that provide additional unemployment payments and stimulus checks for those in need, critical assistance for multiemployer pensions plans, and needed funding to reduce the digital divide.

Extend Unemployment and Stimulus Funding

Film and television production across the country remains shut down as the industry grapples with the challenge of providing a safe and healthy work environment for writers, cast and crew. While many jurisdictions are permitting production to resume, it will take considerable effort to be able to do so safely. During this time creative professionals will continue to suffer from the ongoing disruption to their industry absent additional economic support.

The CARES Act included critical stop-gap measures to help those unemployed and underemployed because of the economic shut down. The HEROES Act would extend this federal assistance by providing additional stimulus checks and continuing the federal unemployment compensation of an extra \$600 per week through next January 31st. Ending this assistance July 31st isn't simply shortsighted, it could be catastrophic for our economy and entertainment industry workers.

Provide Relief for Multiemployer Pension Plans

The HEROES Act also contains critical language needed to prevent the entire multiemployer pension system from collapse. Included in the bill is a special partition program that would

rescue failing pension plans and save the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, while creating a path to allow participants to receive their full benefits as pension plans restore solvency. Importantly, this solution would not strain the resources of financially sound multiemployer plans or our ability to provide benefits for our members. Without immediate federal intervention, though, the imminent collapse of a few large pension plans will affect the retirement security of our members and millions of other participants.

We also strongly support the provisions in the HEROES Act that provide multiemployer pension plans with the time and tools to weather the current market volatility and make up for losses plans will inevitably sustain. A once in a century global pandemic should not jeopardize the retirement security of union members who have fought for a defined benefit pension, many of whom are struggling as a result of widescale shutdowns and the economic downturn.

Congress took this important step following the Great Recession through the Worker, Retiree and Employer Recovery Act of 2008 and the Pension Relief Act of 2010, and allowed pension plans to elect funding relief to amortize these losses over a longer period than otherwise permitted. Union members cannot be left behind when the government takes action to provide relief and assistance to corporations and others. The Producer-Writers Guild of America Pension Plan has prudently managed more than \$3 billion in assets, which are promised retirement benefits for our members, as have the majority of multiemployer pension plans that provide retirement security for millions of Americans. Healthy pension plans like ours should be afforded additional time to mitigate the pandemic related market losses, which no plan could have anticipated, without forcing unnecessary benefit cuts.

Support Accessible and Affordable Broadband

At a time when most Americans remain at home and rely on internet connectivity, legislation to provide better and more affordable broadband is a necessity, not a luxury. We strongly support the provisions of the HEROES Act addressing internet access and the digital divide. This legislation provides a \$50 benefit for those who have been laid off or furloughed to put toward the monthly cost of internet service, prohibits broadband and phone providers from cutting off service because of an inability to pay, and authorizes subsidized broadband service for rural healthcare providers.

Although we do not expect the Senate to adopt the House passed bill, we hope you will insist that the Senate accept and include these three critical provisions that were included in the HEROES Act. Thank you for your attention and continued leadership.

Sincerely,

Corrina Freedman
Political and Legislative Director