

Tuesday, April 14 2020

ESSENTIAL BUT VULNERABLE

California Airport Workers In Crisis



California's Contracted airport workers – who serve critical functions as security officers, cabin cleaners, and wheelchair attendants - are facing an unprecedented crisis.

Thousands of airport workers have been laid off and thousands more are having their hours cut. Many that remain fear that a lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and safety protocols are putting them at risk. These contracted workers, overwhelmingly Black, Latino and API individuals who already live paycheck to paycheck, have been battling on the frontlines since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Recent reports point to the COVID-19 epidemic's disproportionate impact on communities of color.

But our state's airports have an opportunity to chart a different course.

For weeks contracted airport workers have been struggling to get the training and equipment they need to do their jobs in a safe manner.

We count on these essential workers to follow increasingly strict CDC guidelines and protect the public, and they are the workers we will need to bring the airline industry back online as the crisis eases. Yet some employers may not be applying for the funds the federal bailout has made available to airlines and their contractors to keep workers on payroll by covering the cost of their wages and healthcare.

We urge airlines, airline contractors, and airports to marshal all available resources to minimize job loss and ensure the health and safety of the public and this essential workforce.



"Right now I am really worried about how am I going to be able to pay all my bills and help my mother at the same time who is also getting laid off. I also feel the company should take some type of responsibility after putting 13 years into the company. They should try to do everything they can in a pandemic situation like this." -Karla Sanchez, LAX Customs Baggage Handler



"I worked for years helping passengers with disabilities move through the airport. I just got laid off, and I know unemployment will barely cover my rent. If I can't find something part-time, I don't know what I will do. I was homeless before, and that's what I could be facing if I can't find another job. I don't want to be homeless again." -Jerome Perry, SJC Wheel Chair Attendant



"It's hard being laid off but even harder when your company doesn't respect the workers, ignoring seniority and violating your union agreement. We shouldn't have to fight for basic rights at a time like this." -Renato Bustos, Wheelchair Agent, SFO

CONTRACTED AIRPORT WORKERS ARE ESSENTIAL...

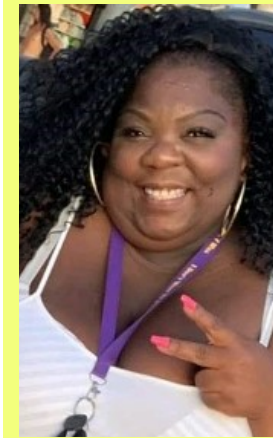
- **Contracted airport workers across California** are cabin cleaners, wheelchair attendants, lobby agents, security officers, TSA agents, janitors, ramp workers and baggage handlers who are essential to the functioning of our airports, including LAX, SFO, San Jose, Oakland, Burbank and San Diego.
- Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, **workers have been playing a critical role in controlling infections and stopping them from spreading through the U.S. aviation system.** Recently the CDC issued additional guidelines for cleaning airplane cabins, wheelchairs and public spaces- which these workers will be asked to execute.
- **An increasing number of airport jobs have been outsourced to contractors**[1], but those workers have not shared in the growth and success the industry has seen over the past decade. The global airline industry's net profit increased almost fourfold between 2013 and 2017,[2] while wages have stagnated or even fallen for large groups of airport ground and passenger service workers.[3]

[1] Dietz, Hall and Jacobs, "Course Correction, Reversing Wage Erosion to Restore Good Jobs at American Airports," October 2013

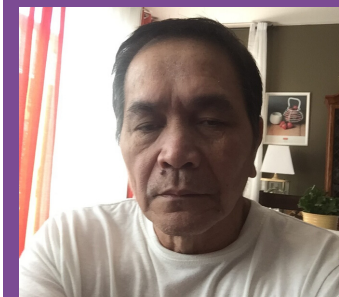
[2] IATA, Economic Performance of the Airline Industry, Industry Forecast, June 2018

[3] Dietz, Hall and Jacobs, "Course Correction, Reversing Wage Erosion to Restore Good Jobs at American Airports," October 2013

...YET COME FROM VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES:



"I am a single parent of one son who has asthma, and I go to work every day not knowing if I'm safe from bringing the virus home. We're already living on a tight budget with my income working for LAX just to pay my rent and my bills. And now I'm living in fear of being laid off, many of my co-workers have already lost their jobs. Some were already working two and three jobs just to survive." -Jovan Houston, LAX Customer Service Agent



Almost all of us are being laid off in the airport, and the people who remain are not getting the support we need to stay safe" -Abe Cruz, Wheelchair Agent, SFO

- These workers are **overwhelmingly Black, Latino and API workers** who already live paycheck to paycheck, dealing with issues like housing insecurity, food insecurity, and inadequate healthcare. Some workers need more than one job to make ends meet, and workers often face impossible choices between paying for housing or medication, or between food and transportation.
- **Airport workers disproportionately live in poverty:** a national survey at the country's 30 busiest hub airports in 2016 found that 42% of workers live below the poverty level. Four in ten workers admitted to going hungry or skipping meals, and nearly a quarter were receiving some form of government assistance.[4]

EXISTING RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITIES MEAN COVID-19 HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS ARE NOT BEING FELT EQUALLY

- Low income groups are not only more likely to have the types of chronic health conditions that make COVID-19 more dangerous, but are also more likely to develop them earlier in life.[5] Black and Hispanic adults are more likely to have asthma or diabetes, while immigrants and people of color are less likely to be insured.[6]
- One study on airport-adjacent communities determined that the population within about three miles of hub airports throughout the country was majority non-white, and has nearly twice the proportion of people of color than the population at large. The study also found that these disparities were increasing, and that these areas were more likely to see growth in all non-white groups that outpaced that of the surrounding regions.[7] These communities also saw larger groups of people living in poverty, renters, and fewer college-educated individuals.[8]

[4] Airport Workers United Press Release - 11/22/2016

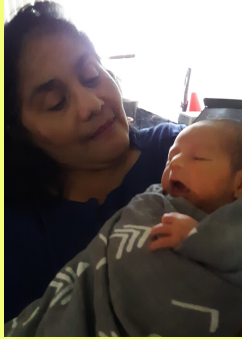
[5] Business Insider, "10 health conditions that make the coronavirus more deadly," 03/23/2020

[6] Kaiser Family Foundation, "Changes in Health Coverage by Race and Ethnicity since the ACA, 2010-2018," 03/05/2020

[7] Woodburn, "Pushback in the Jet Age: Investigating Neighborhood Change, Environmental Justice, and Planning Process in Airport-Adjacent Communities," University of Pennsylvania, 01/01/2016

[8] Ibid

RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITIES AND THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19:



"For me, the deep disinfection of aircraft cabins is extremely important, especially when a passenger who has tested positive with COVID 19 has been on board. Because I take care of my grandchildren, I don't want them to get sick. If I didn't need money to pay for my bills and my rent I wouldn't come to work, the disinfection that is done in the airplanes is in reality very minimal." -Guadalupe Rivas, LAX Cabin Cleaner

- Research suggests that lower income groups are more likely to contract COVID-19, more likely to die from it, and more likely to lose healthcare or income as a result of quarantines and other preventative measures.[9] Service workers also have the least access to telework options among all major occupational groups.[10]
- These disparities are particularly consequential for immigrant communities, where some residents may not have full access to all of the government aid being made available, and where individuals concerned about their immigration status may be hesitant to seek medical care. The fear and anxiety caused by the Trump administration's immigration policy may be "thwarting efforts to protect the public health," according to one attorney at the National Immigration Law Center.[11] Airport-adjacent communities contain a percentage of foreign-born residents about two and a half times greater than that of the general population.[12]
- The CDC is failing to collect and report on the racial and ethnic demographics of patients affected by and tested for COVID-19.[13] Physician groups have called for this data in order to address potentially ongoing disparities in diagnosis and treatment for the virus, arguing that these disparities are difficult to correct without adequate information and direct advocacy.
- Environmental injustice contributes further to the vulnerability for communities of color, such as the areas of South Los Angeles where thousands of LAX workers live. The South Los Angeles area has seen some of the highest asthma emergency visit and hospitalization rates in the country[14], and pollution from the airport operations has been found to reach densely populated communities as far as 10 miles east of LAX.[15]
- A recent study out of Harvard University found clear ties between areas with long-term exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 death rates.[16] The correlation between air pollution and communities of color has been well documented, with one study in 2014 finding that people of color were exposed to nearly 40% more polluted air than whites.[17] Even noise pollution - which has a documented link to increased risk of heart disease[18] and diabetes[19] - is more prevalent in minority communities.[20]

[9] New York Times, "As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread," 03/15/2020

[10] Pew Research Center, "Before the coronavirus, telework was an optional benefit, mostly for the affluent few," 03/20/2020

[11] New York Times, "Immigrants Afraid to Seek Medical Care for Coronavirus," 03/18/2020

[12] Woodburn, "Pushback in the Jet Age: Investigating Neighborhood Change, Environmental Justice, and Planning Process in Airport-Adjacent Communities," University of Pennsylvania, 01/01/2016

[13] BuzzFeed News, "Doctors Are Concerned That Black Communities Might Not Be Getting Access to Coronavirus Tests," 03/22/2020

[14] Scope LA, "Between the 110 and the 405: Environmental Injustice in South Los Angeles," 11/27/2017

[15] LA Times, "Planes' exhaust could be harming communities up to 10 miles from LAX," 05/29/2014

[16] New York Times, "New research links air pollution to higher coronavirus death rates," 04/07/2020

[17] MinnPost, "Huge gap in pollution exposure by race surprises U of M researchers," 04/16/2014

[18] The British Medical Journal, "Residential exposure to aircraft noise and hospital admissions for cardiovascular diseases: multi-airport retrospective study," 09/05/2013

[19] Daily Mail, "Living under flightpath roar 'may cause diabetes': Scientists say residents who are exposed to daily aircraft noise are 86 percent more likely to have the type 2 condition," 04/01/2017

[20] Harvard School of Public Health, "Noise pollution more common in communities of color and racially segregated cities," 2017

CONTRACTED WORKERS HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING ON THE FRONTLINES OF A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS



I have several underlying conditions that COVID-19 could make worse. I have heterozygous for which I take warfarin. I also take meds for my heart, nitroglycerin and an inhaler for asthma. Vulnerable folks should be allowed to take time off without having to lose everything." -Bret Hermone, SFO Security Officer



"I am 68 years old. As soon as I heard how bad COVID-19 was in New York, China, Spain and Italy and how fast was spreading all over, I was so afraid. I asked for permission to be out for at least one month. My boss told me, yes but without salary. Though I need the money, I cared more for my life." -Abby Guerrero Ruiz, LAX Special Services



"I've been working at LAX for 22 years. Some of my coworkers tested positive with the virus so imagine how I feel going to work every day afraid to get it when I have a family waiting for me at home. Sometimes I get headaches just thinking about it. Now we're only working from 16 to 20 hours a week and the company can't understand that with those hours we cannot pay our bills or feed my family. I have been so stressed that my hair been falling out just thinking just how I'm going to pay my rent next month. -Norma Cazares, Cabin Cleaner, LAX

- Airport workers are playing a vital role in protecting the public right now, and this vulnerable group finds itself on the front lines of the crisis. As of early April, over 600 Southwest Airlines and about 100 American Airlines employees have tested positive for COVID-19.[21] The TSA has confirmed that at least 320 agents in 17 states have tested positive for COVID-19, with multiple deaths as of April 9th.[22]
- Despite the fact that contracted airport workers have been putting their health at risk to continue working as the coronavirus threat was growing, there is still no industry-wide health and safety agreement in place for airport workers. **Many have reported that they were not receiving proper training and PPE is still lacking in some locations.** Workers at some California airports only started to receive gloves when they organized as a union to demand them. Now that more airport workers are getting COVID-19 and at least one in California has passed away from the virus, workers are increasingly concerned for their safety.
- **CDC Guidelines for cleaning cabins and wheelchairs have recently become stricter and require more time to execute.** This runs counter to the concept of laying workers off and doing more work with fewer people.

[21] WFAA - Hundreds of American, Southwest airlines employees test positive for COVID-19 - 04/07/2020

[22] Transportation Security Administration - COVID-19 Information - 04/09/2020

CALIFORNIA CAN CHART A DIFFERENT COURSE: SOLUTIONS



"My coworker miss Norma and I work at the airport and our hours are being cut to 5 and 1/2 hours a day. This is going to hurt us trying to pay rent. Anyone who pays a mortgage or a car payment is in trouble. We've been on the front lines and any prospect of losing our healthcare is like a no-win situation."
-Marcus Thames, LAX Security Officer



"I believe that we are the front line workers providing security at San Francisco International Airport and deserve more protection in the form of additional emergency sick leave. We have people getting sick as they deal with the public and other airport employees on a daily basis. However there are those that cannot afford to take time off work and continue to force themselves to come to work. I feel if we were granted emergency sick leave that this would be a much safer work environment for all." -Tom Ragsdale, SFO Security Officer

- This is an opportunity to lift up tens of thousands of airport workers across the state, and to directly impact hundreds of thousands of households in the communities of color surrounding our major airports. LAX alone has at least 10,000 subcontracted airport workers and is adjacent to majority black and Latino neighborhoods and cities, while the communities surrounding the airports in San Jose and San Francisco are majority nonwhite, with large Asian, Hispanic, and Latino populations.[23] Oakland is particularly diverse, with significant representation of Black, Asian, Native American and senior populations adjacent to the airport.[24]
- The federal bailout has made funds available to airlines and their contractors to keep workers on payroll by covering the cost of their wages and healthcare. A number of contractors are now applying for these funds, but many workers remain in the dark. Those already laid off do not yet know if they will be brought back to work or if they will soon lose the healthcare they and their families rely upon. **Retaining enough contracted airport workers is the clear path forward to an economic recovery or the industry, so airlines are prepared to get things working again after the crisis passes.**

- Pass local emergency sick leave policies & require family healthcare. The federal legislation leaves out employees of employers with greater than 500 employees. In order to make sure infectious people can afford to stay home, local jurisdictions need to pass policies to cover our airports and immediately implement 14 additional paid sick days (80 hours) immediately available and not subject to accrual requirements, to be used in the event of a public health emergency.

[23] U.S. Census Bureau - Demographic Facts - 04/2020

[24] Woodburn, "Pushback in the Jet Age: Investigating Neighborhood Change, Environmental Justice, and Planning Process in Airport-Adjacent Communities," University of Pennsylvania, 01/01/2016

CALIFORNIA CAN CHART A DIFFERENT COURSE: SOLUTIONS



"Where we work is hazardous and the company has to ensure people who are assigned to critical areas have protective equipment, as well as hazard pay."
-Nestor Dolde, SFO Wheelchair Agent



Covid tests are extremely limited so paid quarantine measures are no help to those of us in the workforce who can't get tested until they have a fever of 100.4 or higher. Employees are already given a limited amount of sick hours especially if they are newly hired. Emergency sick hours would protect our entire work force by ensuring that ill employees who have exhausted their sick leave do not come in and can do so without fear of financial stress from unpaid work days. -Lintz Scott, SFO Security Officer

- All workers and their families, regardless of immigration status, must have equal access to taxpayer paid economic relief and preventative measures, including COVID-19 testing and treatment.
- Airports need to avail themselves of federal stimulus funds and take an active enforcement role. Federal money (\$10B) is available for airports to "to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus." Each airport needs a plan for how to spot check safety compliance with contractors and suspend licenses for repeat offenders. There is little or no direct oversight of outside contractors and companies and their implementation of COVID-19 safety protocols.
- Just as the federal industry bailout had relief for impacted workers at its center, **any state or local financial relief for airlines must be centered on airport workers.** The \$3 billion fund for workers of airline subcontractors may not be enough to cover the labor cost for all the employers for the duration of the public health crisis. As the airlines request additional local support, there is an opportunity to enact a much-needed additional layer of protection of workers and accountability for airlines.
- **Revise CAL OSHA guidelines.** CAL OSHA guidelines need to reflect the exposure and risk to airport employees and propose appropriate measures to minimize contamination.

#Essential