



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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July 14th, 2020

The Honorable John Cornyn
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
404 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cornyn and Senator Cruz:

As we move toward the debate for economic stimulus to combat the effects of COVID-19, I want to draw particular attention to an area decimated by this virus: the hospitality industry.

According to the Texas Workforce Commission, of the 10 companies with the highest number of layoffs in the Gulf Coast region, 6 are in the restaurant industry.

- To give a specific example, eateries and companies associated with Pappas Restaurants, such as Pappadeux Seafood Kitchen, Pappas Bar-B-Q and Dot Coffee Shop, reported 6,348 total layoffs in March and April.

The effects of coronavirus are costing hotel workers their jobs as well. Houston First is a local government corporation funded by Houston's hotel occupancy tax. Houston First owns the George R. Brown Convention Center and Hilton Hotel of the Americas and, while heavily subsidized by the city, the adjacent Marriott Marquis is privately owned.

- Houston First Workers at the downtown hub are largely employed by private companies contracted to operate the facilities. They have experienced over 800 layoffs since March. The organization relies on hotel occupancy taxes, parking and venue revenues - which are down over 50 percent.

The next package that Congress passes must include support for local government corporations like Houston First who have lost jobs because of plummeting revenues. It must also include support for the thousands of employees and hundreds of restaurants. Hard working people from across the country are being furloughed, laid off, and having salaries reduced through no fault of their own. The federal government must step up to support them and the businesses that employ them during this challenging time.

Many of these workers can least afford even a temporary loss in wages. As with any economic calamity, the people climbing up from the bottom of the socio-economic ladder are the most vulnerable. I fear we will experience a housing crisis if action is not swiftly taken to address it.

According to Texas Housers, 20,575 evictions have been filed in Harris County since the CARES Act was passed.

- Here in Houston, we were able to dedicate \$15 million in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (“CARES”) Act dollars toward rental assistance. The funds were administered by Houston nonprofit BakerRipley but were exhausted in 90 minutes.

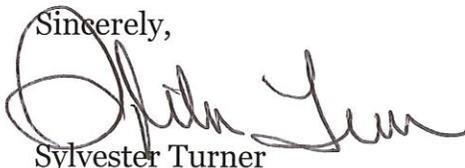
We are trying to do the most we can with the little that we have. More must be done to keep our most vulnerable citizens from losing their housing through no fault of their own.

As you contemplate priorities in the next package of legislation, I urge you to adopt proposals from the House Financial Services Committee and dedicate \$100 billion to an Emergency Rental Assistance Fund and \$75 billion to a Homeowner Assistance Fund to avert a looming wave of evictions and foreclosures. Further, I urge you to extend the eviction and foreclosure moratorium to all renters and borrowers and mortgage forbearance available to all homeowners.

The hospitality industry, made up of workers and the businesses that employ them, are in desperate need of federal support. As you know, Houston is an internationally recognized culinary city that attracts people from all over the world. Support is needed now so that our workers can be secure in their homes and businesses can weather the economic storm caused by COVID-19.

Again, my appreciation to you for all you do for Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sylvester Turner', written over a printed name.

Sylvester Turner

Mayor