

March 19, 2020

TO: Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader United States Senate
317 Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

TO: Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Speaker of the House of Representatives
United State Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Speaker Pelosi:

We are writing to urge that any economic relief must act to put the health, safety, and financial well-being of American workers first in their efforts to address the COVID-19 crisis, this must include the wellbeing of the estimated 125,000 subcontracted service workers at our nation's airports and their families.¹

The airline industry is calling for over \$50 billion in assistance, yet the four biggest U.S. carriers in the last five years spent 80% of the amount on share buybacks.² During this period the industry has actively fought subcontracted airport workers' efforts to win living wages, sick days, and health care. We cannot simply write the airline industry a blank check.

Cabin cleaners, wheelchair attendants, baggage handlers, security officers and other employees of airline contractors are on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic and play a critical role in stopping infections from spreading throughout the U.S. aviation system and into cities and towns across the country. **Any economic relief to the airline industry must also protect and invest in the employees of their contractors whose health and livelihood is on the line.** That the Airline industry has chosen to create a shadow economy by contracting out workers performing critical functions to increase profit margins, does not mean that these workers are any less worthy of assistance than direct airline employees. Moreover, these are the workers who can least afford layoffs, since they are generally the lowest paid workers at the airports,³ meaning that they are unlikely to have substantial savings. Many of them were already struggling on low pay and without paid sick days or health benefits. Already approximately 1,000 contracted workers are being laid off at Philadelphia International Airport,⁴ Delta is laying off 800 contracted workers,⁵ while nearly 90 security employees are being laid off at the Atlanta International Airport.⁶ Doubtless, there will be more layoffs in the upcoming days. While we appreciate the steps taken by certain airlines like limiting executive compensation and allowing early retirements to limit the impact on direct employees,⁷ we cannot simply ignore contracted workers. We have a moral obligation to ensure these workers aren't excluded from relief and that they be treated like direct airline employees.

In this unprecedented time, Congress should do all it can to protect the economic health of the nation, but it is critical that contracted airport workers who are exposed to millions of passengers have full access to emergency relief like layoff protection, paid sick leave, and affordable health care. Unfortunately, the law Congress recently passed to provide some emergency sick days will exclude the majority of contracted airport workers, because it exempts companies with more than 500 employees. We must ensure

that no taxpayer dollars go to the airline industry without essential protections for airport workers.

Sincerely,

¹ SEIU Estimate

² <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/17/coronavirus-airline-aid-must-include-worker-protections-unions-say.html>

³ https://economicrt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Flying_Right_2017.pdf (page 3)

⁴ <https://6abc.com/business/massive-layoffs-begin-at-phl-amid-covid-19-crisis/6027869/>

⁵ <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/delta-set-to-part-ways-with-800-contractors-amid-covid-19-outbreak>

⁶ <https://www.newsbreak.com/georgia/atlanta/news/00JbjNXr/security-company-laying-off-90-employees-at-the-atlanta-airport>

⁷ <https://viewfromthewing.com/united-airlines-tells-employees-to-expect-job-cuts/> ; <https://www.ajc.com/blog/airport/more-than-000-delta-air-lines-employees-take-unpaid-leave/czzGXjjvfv8GQhDSzV4mIP/>