



American Society of Media Photographers

P.O. Box 31207
Bethesda, MD 20824

4/13/20

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schumer:

I am writing on behalf of the 4000 independent commercial photographers who are members of the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP) who are all small business owners; men and women typically working in businesses of one to five people. They are embedded in the local business communities and rely on those relationships for much of their livelihood. They are also part of our freelance workforce.

A 2019 report by the independent research firm Edelman Intelligence, for the Freelancer's Union and Upwork, indicates that there are 57 million Americans working who self-identify as freelance workers constituting 35% of the American workforce. In our industry sector, 75% of people are freelance workers. They are microbusinesses, the smallest of small business. Many of our members are also editorial photographers who are now documenting the effects of the coronavirus on our society and putting themselves at potential risk so they can keep the public fully informed. This documentation is critical to provide a clear sense of the scale of the impacts on society, and in particular what government and health services across the country are doing daily to mitigate the pandemic.

Helping ensure that our members have the wherewithal to continue to do this work is imperative.

Providing access to affordable health insurance is a critical component in providing an adequate social safety net for freelance workers. We want the next stimulus bill to include provisions that ensure that the federal government makes a special enrollment period available nationwide to those needing to avail themselves of a market exchange solution under the terms of the Affordable Care Act. It is essential that the Executive branch be prevented from using court actions or Presidential orders to gut the Affordable Care Act at this time. My members also want to see a uniform expansion of Medicaid extended to all 50 states as a means of providing for all those who cannot afford to acquire health insurance via any other means. We are urging that Congress mandate the Executive Branch appoint a single U.S. military leader with experience in managing procurement and the logistics of distribution, using the full authority of the Defense Procurement Act, to oversee the acquisition and distribution of medical supplies, including PPE protective gear such as masks, gowns, gloves, and ventilators, so states have what they need to combat the coronavirus. This would also include production and distribution of testing kits sufficient to carry out mass testing, utilizing the best advice of medical experts. Further, it is imperative that a unified nationwide system be put in place to address the fundamentals of public health so that testing produces sufficient information to enable the opening of the economy as rapidly but safely as possible, operating on the basis of sound medical guidance from the scientists who have been attempting to mitigate the health effects of COVID-19. We cannot afford continuation of a politicized process that has states competing with each other for scarce medical resources.

Given the nature of freelance work and the impact of “gig” economy work that members of the creative community may be carrying out, ASMP is urging that any legislative relief funds for small business be broad enough to ensure that it reaches our members and others similarly situated. They need a solution that covers their lost income until clients resume normal business operations. It is clear that the first round of stimulus was insufficient to mitigate the full effects of the coronavirus on small businesses and that more funding is needed to provide genuine relief.

The immediate negative business impacts are already being reported to me by our members as larger corporations, who are their clients, cancel assignments and postpone work. In a recent survey, 90% of our respondents indicated that they had experienced immediate cancellations or postponement of pending work, and 33% expect a loss of income between \$10,000 and \$30,000 in the next three to six months. To a small business owner, these represent devastating losses.

While the Small Business Administration has pledged to make money available for emergency small business loans our members, as well as others, are struggling with the application process for government-backed SBA loan programs and banks continue to send confusing signals in rolling them out. The difficulty local banks and other lending institutions have had in connecting with small businesses, coupled with some of the restrictions being imposed by large national banks, suggests the need for additional oversight and support for the programs intended to be lifelines to small businesses. We need to ensure adequate clarity is being offered to banks and other lending institutions about program rollouts, so barriers are not inserted that slow the response and sow confusion about lending terms to those seeking aid.

We are looking to you to exercise leadership and produce the necessary bipartisanship to pass legislation that offers meaningful assistance to workers and families, including those who work as freelancers and gig economy workers, such as our members. We are ready to help to assist with passage of the legislation. Thank you in advance for your attention.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Kennedy
Executive Director, ASMP

877.771.2767 | 240.601.8041 Cell
P.O. Box 31207 | Bethesda, MD 20824
kennedy@asmp.org | www.asmp.org