



Coronavirus, Survivors, and the Workplace

The Impact on Survivors

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed what survivors of domestic and sexual violence have always known: [a living wage](#), [paid leave](#), and [flexible scheduling](#) are critical lifelines that allow workers the ability to take time off or adjust their schedules to attend to health and safety needs without losing income.

Survivors, especially those who are paid low wages, face job-related economic and safety barriers every day. For workers surviving violence without the benefit of paid leave in order to access medical, legal, or counseling services, the threat of coronavirus further exacerbates their economic insecurity. Low-wage workers are less likely to have paid leave or savings that could possibly sustain them during times they need to be away from the job. Participating in social distancing and self-quarantining will no doubt impact them the hardest, blocking any path toward financial independence and safety that workers who are survivors may have started to traverse.

Although some [states and local jurisdictions](#) have enacted paid leave policies, the vast majority of survivors often face the impossible choice between their safety and a paycheck. And as school districts nationwide close to slow the spread of coronavirus, many workers who are survivors may be forced to leave their jobs in order to care for their families. Survivors who are sole breadwinners without access to any childcare, will be facing an impossible situation; one that demonstrates the clear need for paid leave.

For some survivors of domestic violence, going to work or school can provide a safe haven and respite from the abuse experienced at home or in interpersonal and familial relationships. And the added stress of close quarters created by social distancing measures may indeed exacerbate violence experienced at home. Generally, reports of domestic and sexual violence increase during times of [crisis, disaster, and economic hardship](#). Initial reports out of the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic indicate [a tripling of domestic violence cases reported to police after quarantines were imposed](#). Any extension of unemployment benefits to mitigate the impact of coronavirus should anticipate the likelihood that workers who are survivors will continue to face the choice between their safety (whether on the job and at home) and a paycheck.

The [Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2019](#), which passed by a bipartisan majority of the House of Representatives in April 2019, proposed expanded access to unemployment insurance to workers forced to leave their jobs because of critical health and safety needs. Perhaps we can keep in mind, once this pandemic has abated, the impact sexual violence, domestic violence, and stalking has on a worker experiencing these abuses and advocate for all workers in our communities by supporting measures such as sick and safe leave, unemployment insurance,

and a living wage. Measures that center health and safety are not only necessary for the well-being of survivors and their families, but are also critical for the health and safety of the country as a whole.

For Workers who are Survivors

Ask your employer what policies are in place if social distancing is mandated. Is teleworking available to you? How soon can you be set up to telework and what do you need in order to do so? What leave, wage, and job protections does your employer provide? If those protections are not already provided by your employer, to protect the health and safety of the community, what would your employer be willing to provide because of the pandemic? If your position requires you to be in contact with those who have the virus or have been exposed to the virus, what health and safety measures and personal protective equipment are available to you? If you work for an employer with others, you don't need to necessarily ask these questions by yourself. If your coworkers have similar concerns, you can make a request for answers to these questions as a group.

In addition, some states and localities allow for those who are forced to stay home or who have to work reduced hours to file an unemployment insurance claim. States and localities with paid family leave may provide assistance to workers who temporarily cannot work while taking care of someone infected with the virus. The Family Medical Leave Act protects workers, in some workplaces, from losing their job when experiencing a serious health condition, or taking care of family members or other obligations. And workers who have been diagnosed as having the virus or have been exposed and quarantined, may be able to file a disability claim if available in your state. The U.S. Department of Labor recently issued [guidance](#) to states on how they can amend their laws to help workers impacted by the coronavirus. Contact the [labor office](#) in your state to ask what protections are available or a [local legal aid office](#) that can advise you of your rights and your employer's responsibilities.

Some Ways to Support Low-Wage Workers during the Pandemic

Hourly, low-wage, and gig workers will be especially impacted by measures taken to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. Many will lose income, shifts, and may even lose their jobs altogether. For those who are receiving a salary or teleworking while practicing social distancing, and have the financial means to do so, consider ways you can financially support workers in your community who may not be able to work. If you are able, provide those who regularly take care of your children, clean your house, walk your dog, etc. with the wages you will not be paying them due to social distancing. Many restaurants, nail salons, and other establishments that provide services to the public will likely, at the very least, temporarily close. If you have a favorite server at your neighborhood restaurant, barista, nail technician, or similar professional who provides services to you, before their workplace closes, drop off an envelope addressed to them with some money or a check inside. Buy gift certificates from the establishments they work for now to be used once circumstances return to normal business operations. Donate non-perishable food or provide financial support to your local food bank. If those who have more financial stability spread the "wealth" within their communities as a good neighbor, client, or patron, we can work together to "flatten the curve," while still ensuring low-paid workers can continue to support themselves and their families.