

New Orleans and Westbank COVID19 CRISIS ASSISTANCE HANDBOOK

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You're not alone...

The novel Coronavirus or COVID-19 is impacting our country, our state, and all of us in unprecedented ways. For many of our employers, business is down, and that means layoffs or reduced hours for workers. Already many have lost jobs or are living in fear of losing their jobs in the near future. If you have recently found yourself laid off, or struggling through a reduction in hours or wages, this booklet will prove to be a valuable asset for you. We are committed to working with and assisting you through this challenging time.

We understand how an unexpected job loss can be devastating and the impact it has on your family and community. The staff of UNITE HERE Local 23 is trained to assist you.

We encourage you to do your part to prevent the spread of the disease by practicing the principals of social isolation to the best of your ability. If you want to speak to UNITE HERE Local 23 staff, we encourage you to call your organizer, rather than come into the office.

The situation with regard to available assistance is changing. This booklet offers resources for you that are current as of the time of writing. The agencies listed can offer help with financial problems, food, shelter, utilities, health care, legal services and job search assistance. In the coming days, new assistance may become available from federal, state or local government. We will do everything we can to update this booklet.

If you cannot find the specific information you need in this booklet, you can call **404-614-1000** or go to **211.org** - Source for Basic Health and Human Services Information and Referral. (This will be different in each state) ***

In an effort to make our community a better place to live, work, raise a family and retire, it is the goal of UNITE HERE Local 23 to be responsive to the needs of the membership.

The information in this Guide is intended for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Should you have specific questions regarding your legal rights with respect to any of the matters discussed in this Guide, including but not limited to the impact of receiving certain forms of public assistance on your immigration status, you should seek the advice of a qualified legal professional in your community. The inclusion of agencies and programs in this booklet does not constitute endorsement nor does omission suggest disapproval.

Unemployment

Did you know that you can apply for Unemployment for the following reasons?

- 1. Your work hours have been reduced because of lack of work due to Coronavirus.
- 2. Your workplace closes temporarily, and you are not being compensated.
- 3. You have been instructed not to go to work, and you are not being paid while at home.

If you are asked for a union phone number, give them this number: (212)332-9346

Federal Unemployment

According to The Louisiana Workforce Commission, those who are already receiving state benefits will see the extra cash deposited into their bank accounts or onto debit cards, depending on how they currently receive aid.

Laid-off workers who have filed for unemployment will begin collecting \$600 per week through July 31, in addition to the maximum of \$247 per week in state benefits they have been receiving. It is not yet clear when the federal funds will

Apply for unemployment online:

begin in the State of Louisiana.

https://www.louisianaworks.net/hire/vosnet/Default.aspx

- Look for the Reemployment Services tab
- Be sure to answer "YES" to the question, "Are you filing for Unemployment Insurance benefits for reasons related to COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?

OR

You can Apply for unemployment by calling the Louisiana Workforce Commission at

866-783-5567

• Be sure to answer "YES" to the question, "Are you filing for Unemployment Insurance benefits for reasons related to COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?

You will need:

- Your Social Security number
- The name, address, and telephone number of any place you have worked in the last 24 months (this information must be entered exactly as it appears on your check stub)
- The name and local number of your union hall, if applicable
- Your Alien Registration number, if you are not a U.S. citizen
- Valid e-mail address

Louisiana Unemployment Filing Video Tutorial:

http://www.laworks.net/Stars/HiRE Job Seeker Guide/story html5.html

Filing Unemployment Instructions:

- 1. Click on the "File a Claim" link on the home page under the unemployment tab.
- 2. Click the next button after reading the Claimant Eligibility page.
- 3. Read the "Welcome to Hire Page" before clicking the next button to proceed
- 4. If you have worked during the time frame listed, click the yes button to proceed
- 5. Fill out all information
- 6. Once unemployment insurance registration has begun, it may say that you may not meet the criteria for filing an unemployment insurance claim. The system will provide an explanation why. If it does, you may need to file your claim over the phone at 866-783-5567
- 7. If you do meet the criteria, review your login in information, then press next.

- 8. On the next pages, complete any field that has an asterisk (*) on it. You will not be able to proceed until all of required blanks have been filled.
- 9. Depending on your response to questions, you may be directed to complete a fact-finding form to provide additional information about your response.
- 10. Once you get to the payment information section, you are given the choice of direct deposit into your bank account or a debit card option where you will receive a Chase Bank debit card in the mail. If your unemployment claim is approved, this is where your unemployment benefits will be received on a weekly basis.
- 11. Select the Next button to complete your registration.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

- 1. Lyft- Lyft service is providing free ride codes to community feeding sites
 - a. Open the **Lyft** App
 - b. Tap the menu icon in the top left corner
 - c. Tap "Promo" in the menu that appears
 - d. Tap "enter promo code" to add the code CV19NOLAPS20
 - e. Tap "apply" to finish
- 2. Link to Food banks in your area: https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank
- 3. Apply for SNAP/Food stamps:

http://www.dcfs.louisiana.gov/page/get-snap or call the Louisiana State Hotline at 888-LA HELPU (888-524-3578)

4. For an updated list of COVID19 School Feeding locations for kids: New Orleans- https://nolapublicschools.com/covid19/nutrition
Jefferson Parish- https://www.jpschools.org/Page/3676

5. Second Harvest Food Bank toll-free for immediate assistance at (855)-392-9338 Monday- through Friday, 8am to 7pm

New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORD), in partnership with Second Harvest, is offering hot meals from 4-6 PM at all rec centers, except Annunciation Rec Center.

6. Free Drive Up Food Pantry for Gig and Hospitality Workers



- 1. United Way of Southeast Louisiana: www.unitedwaySELA.org/hospitalitycares
- No Hunger NOLA: Meal Kit Relief Program for service industry workers: <u>https://forms.gle/XWY3qq9kcMXEPeNz5</u>
- Total Community Action Food Pantry is offering supplemental food to families daily. All families are eligible @4518 Thalia Street, Monday-Wednesday, 8 am-5pm

3. Port Orleans Brewery Company- Pick up free curbside meals Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, noon - 4 p.m. (or as long as supplies last) from 4124 Tchoupitoulas St. This relief effort, sponsored by Port Orleans Brewing Company and partners, welcomes hospitality workers, first responders, musicians and artists and is open to anyone.

Utility Assistance

- 1. **Sewage and Water Board**: The New Orleans Sewage and Water Board has agreed to suspend water service shut-off and will work to restore water services to customers that have been disconnected.
- 2. **Entergy:** For the next 30 days, Entergy will halt customer disconnections if nonpayment is the result of the Coronavirus. Customers can call 800-368-3749 or visit entergyneworleans.com
- 3. Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program)

 Financial assistance may be available to pay energy and heating bills. Program is income based and subject to funding availability.
- 4. Energy Payment Assistance in Jefferson Parish: JEFFCAP Financial assistance may be available to pay energy and heating bills. Program is income based and subject to funding availability. Call JEFFCAP offices at 504-736-6900
- 5. Internet and Cellular Service:
- **Cox** will not terminate service to residences or small businesses that are unable to pay their bills due to disruptions caused by the coronavirus. For those affected, Cox will waive late fees as well.
- Verizon will waive late fees for residential or small businesses that have been impacted by COVID19. In addition, the company will not terminate service to any resident or small business because of their inability to pay their bills due to disruptions caused by COVID19
- AT&T, CenturyLink, Sprint and T-mobile have also publically committed to ensure that customers are not cut off during the COVID19 pandemic. This includes no shutoffs, no late fees and making wi-fi hot spots available to anyone that needs them.

FREE/REDUCED COST INTERNET

If you need internet at home, Comcast and AT&T both have free/low cost programs for people who are on SNAP, TANF, MEDICAID, WIC or other public assistance. See the program for more information. See ATT Map https://www.att.com/Common/merger/files/pdf/att-us-service-area-map-21-state.pdf.

Comcast's Internet Essentials program is free for the first two months and then \$9.95 after that. More information at: https://www.internetessentials.com/.

AT&T's Access Program is \$5 or \$10 per month. There is a monthly maximum data usage and there are fees if you go over. https://www.att.com/support/article/u-verse-high-speed-internet/KM1094463/

PAYING RENT/MORTGAGE

1. City of New Orleans COVID19 Rental Assistance Program:

The City of New Orleans in partnership with Total Community Action is offering rental assistance to households that have been impacted by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. The rental assistance program which will begin on April 1, 2020, will be open to individuals whose household income has been reduced as a result of COVID-19 and that are not receiving rental assistance through other organizations. Applicants will be required to provide documentation of their hardship.

Please see program guidelines online for eligibility

https://ready.nola.gov/incident/coronavirus/city-of-new-orleans-covid-19-rental-assistance-

pro/?fbclid=IwAR0DX2KG2NylAHfffiU61OjPldmOOQs5nBJ_4i8YAZsL9s02P2v 5Dn_7cZA

To apply, residents should call the Mayor's Office of Community Development (OCD) at 504-658-4200 to begin the intake process.

- 2. For legal issues with your landlord, call **Southeast Louisiana Legal Services's hotline** at **1-844-244-7871** Or visit **www.slls.org**
- 3. If you believe your fair housing rights have been violated, the Louisiana Department of Justice is ready to help you file a complaint. You have one year from the date of the alleged act of discrimination to file a complaint. To fill out an online complaint form in the Louisiana Attorney General's Office, go to:

https://www.ag.state.la.us/FairHousing/Complaint

Paying Rent/Evictions

The Louisiana Supreme Court has <u>ordered</u> most hearings scheduled between March 16, 2020, and May 3, 2020, to be continued and reset to a date not earlier than May 4, 2020.

The <u>new CARES Act</u> passed by the federal government stops some landlords from filing evictions for the next 120 days (through July 25, 2020). This does not apply to eviction cases that were filed before March 27th.

Landlords covered under this law:

- Cannot file for eviction if you do not pay your rent during this time and
- Cannot charge you any fees for not paying your rent.

But, you can still be evicted if you break your lease in another way.

Your landlord cannot file for eviction if:

- You live in subsidized housing. This applies to federal housing programs, including:
 - Public housing
 - Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program
 - Section 8 project-based housing
 - Section 202 housing for the elderly
 - Section 811 housing for people with disabilities
 - Section 236 multifamily rental housing
 - Section 221(d)(3) Below Market Interest Rate (BMIR) housing
 - HOME
 - Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)
 - McKinney-Vento Act homelessness programs (42 U.S.C. § 11360, et seq.)
 - Section 515 Rural Rental Housing
 - Sections 514 and 516 Farm Labor Housing
 - Section 533 Housing Preservation Grants
 - Section 538 multifamily rental housing
 - Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)
- You also cannot be evicted for not paying your rent if your landlord has a federally backed mortgage. It may be hard to know if your landlord has this type of loan.
 - If your landlord does file an eviction case during this time, say in your answer that you believe your landlord has a federally backed mortgage, and ask the court to make them prove that they do not have a federally-backed mortgage.
 - If you are served with an eviction, contact a lawyer right away, especially if you believe that you are protected by this new law.

Mortgage Help

What if I can't pay my mortgage?

Congress passed a law requiring that borrowers with federally-backed mortgages be given a forbearance for up to six months if they fell behind due to a Coronavirus-related hardship. And it's possible to get the forbearance extended for another six months.

<u>Federally-backed mortgages</u> are ones owned or insured by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, or the FHA, VA, or USDA.

How do I find out if my mortgage is federally-backed?

Fannie and Freddie own about half of the U.S. mortgage loans, and most people have no idea their mortgage is owned by Fannie or Freddie. Homeowners can check whether their loan is backed by <u>Fannie Mae</u> or <u>Freddie Mac</u> by using the agencies' loan look up tools and can confirm whether their loan is FHA-insured by reviewing their loan documents and mortgage statements.

What does a forbearance mean?

A forbearance means the servicer will allow you to send no payment, or a reduced payment, for a period of time. At the end of the forbearance period, you owe those skipped payments, but your servicer can agree to modify your loan or put the missed payments at the end of the loan. It's important to contact your servicer before the forbearance is over to apply for help if you will not be able to pay the skipped payments all at once.

How do I get a forbearance?

You have to contact your mortgage servicer (the company that takes your payments normally) to ask for a forbearance. Some companies have long wait times on the phone. Try the servicer's website to see if you can ask for a forbearance online. You may be asked to submit a hardship letter.

What if my loan is not federally-backed?

Many mortgage companies are offering forbearance plans for all of their loans. Contact your servicer to ask for a forbearance if you need one. Remember to reach back out before the forbearance is over if you're going to need a loan modification.

Are foreclosure sales happening in Louisiana right now?

If you have a federally-backed mortgage, those foreclosures have been stopped for 60 days (through May 17th) unless the property is vacant or abandoned.

If your mortgage is not federally-backed, Louisiana has not entered a statewide order blocking foreclosure sales. However, it's possible your lender may have decided to cancel the sale, possibly due to a local stay-at-home order. The only way to be sure whether a sale is happening is to call the law firm that sent you the foreclosure letter and ask. If they tell you the sale has been canceled, ask them to confirm by fax or email. If they refuse to send it in writing, you can send a fax or email yourself confirming the cancellation in writing.

If my home has been foreclosed, do I have to move out?

After a foreclosure sale, the person that buys the home in the auction must file an eviction in the county in which you live. If you get served with an eviction lawsuit, you may have an extension of time to file an answer if your county court has entered an emergency order. Call or check the court's website. However, if you wait to file an answer, you must file your answer as soon as the emergency order is lifted. If you file an answer now, a hearing will not be scheduled until the emergency order is lifted. Once your hearing is scheduled, you should attend the hearing. When that hearing happens, the judge will likely give you only seven days after the hearing in which to move.

1. Advice for Section 8 & Public Housing Tenants

- a. HANO's offices are currently closed. If you have lost your job or income, it is EXTREMELY important that you contact your case worker and let them know so your tenant portion can be adjusted. Make sure that you leave a paper trail showing that you have communicated with your case worker. Your case worker's email is usually first initial last name @ hano.org (example: asmith@hano.org). You can also call and leave a voice message, but be sure that you record the voicemail on your phone so you have evidence that you informed HANO of your job or income loss.
- b. Our understanding is that Section 8 inspections for new housing should still be happening. Be in contact with your case worker if you are waiting on your new housing being approved. In order to check on the inspection status of your new home, you can contact the company, McCright, at 504-401-9529 or you can email inspections@mccright.com.
- 2. Financial and legal assistance for homeless prevention, which includes Rental Assistance and Foreclosure Mitigation:

504-658-4200 or 504-658-2299

- 3. Federal HUD helpline, available 24 hours a day: 888-995-HOPE
- **4. Jefferson Parish Assistance:** Comprehensive Housing Counseling to tenants and homeowners. Housing financial assistance as available; Financial Fitness Training, and Reverse Mortgage Counseling to seniors that are 62 years or older. Call JEFFCAP offices at 504-736-6900

Child Support Assistance and Family

- 1. **Child Support:** Go to http://www.dss.state.la.us/page/137 or call 1-888-LAHELP-U (1-888-524-3578)
- 2. Childcare Assistance: https://cafe-cp.doe.louisiana.gov/edselfservice/
- **3. Junior League diaper bank locations:** https://www.jlno.org/community/diaper-bank/
- **4.** Courts are operating on extremely limited bases, but if you need protection from abuse, resources are available.
- 5. Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services

NEW ORLEANS FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER Call: (504) 866-9554

24/7 hotline, safety planning, emergency protections orders, limited clinic availability, limited in-person services. All other services are telephone, including counseling, emergency assistance, and legal advocacy.

Non-Profit Organizations That Want to Help

• **USBG National Charity Foundation**-Apply for Bartender Emergency Assistance:

https://www.usbgfoundation.org/beap

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Disaster Distress Hotline 1-800-985-5990
- United Way COVID19 Economic Relief Fund: Call 1-866-211-9966
- United Way of Southeast Louisiana- Hospitality Worker Grant https://www.unitedwaysela.org/hospitality-cares-pandemic-response-fund-0

Applicant must submit:

- Electronic copy of your driver's license or other government-issued ID
- Pay stubs for most recent 30 days
- Copy of your most recent 2018 or 2019 federal tax form
- Another Round Another Rally: offering \$500 relief grants for hospitality workers who lost their jobs or had their hours slashed in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak

https://anotherroundanotherrally.org/?fbclid=IwAR2NYI5YUCDvpIjCYRjxzvxaoMrYOLW3DWANoQKDJEKZT-yFf6x2OsCXias

Another Round, Another Rally is a nonprofit financial resource for the hospitality industry. We provide reimbursement grants and immersive educational scholarships to further the education of underrepresented

voices in the community, and supply emergency assistance to those employed in restaurants, bars, and hotels who have fallen on unexpected hardship.

Medical

- 1. Union Plus: Free assistance in negotiating medical bills https://www.unionplus.org/hardship-help/medical-bill-negotiating-service
- **2. Medicaid Application:**https://sspweb.lameds.ldh.la.gov/selfservice/

Legal Assistance

- **1. Disibility Rights:** https://disabilityrightsla.org/get-help-now/
 Or call 1-800-960-7705
- **2. The Pro Bono Project:** Clients and individuals in need of legal assistance or self-help can reach The Pro Bono Project at 504-581-4043. Email for clients is intake@probono-no.org and for self-represented litigants (i.e., self help) selfhelp@probono-no.org.
- 3. <u>Southeast Louisiana Legal Services's-hotline at 1-844-244-7871</u> or go to: www.slls.org

Stimulus Checks from the IRS

The federally passed CARES Act includes the individual stimulus payment, officially titled the "2020 recovery rebate for individuals." It means that the government will issue checks that are advances on your tax rebate.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

The IRS is going to look at your 2019 tax return or if that's not available the 2018 return. If you haven't filed a return for either year — for example, you collected Social Security, but did not have enough taxable income to necessitate the filing of a return — the IRS will determine that you are eligible for a check based on your Form SSA-1099, Social Security Benefit Statement.

Not everyone will get a check. You'll need to have provided a valid social security number for yourself, your spouse and any qualifying children on your tax returns, and those who are claimed as a dependent on another's tax return also won't be receiving a payment.

Those on the higher end of the income scale will be shut out of the program because the payment phases out once your "adjusted gross income (AGI)" exceeds \$75,000 (if single, \$150,000 if married). Once over those thresholds, you'll lose \$5 of your payment for every \$100 your AGI exceeds those thresholds.

CHECK AMOUNT

Once the IRS has either your 2019 return, 2018 return, or Social Security statement, it's going to cut you a check for \$1,200 if single, \$2,400 if married filing jointly, PLUS \$500 for each child under the age of 17.

If you provided direct deposit information to the IRS on your 2018 or 2019 tax return, you can be paid electronically. You can also call the IRS and update your address. Checks are guaranteed before December 31, 2020, but no additional guidance has been issued to date.

Here are some examples to provide context:

Example A: A is a single taxpayer. On A's 2019 tax return, A had gross income of \$50,000 and an income tax liability of \$1,000. Despite the fact that A's tax liability for 2019 A was only \$1,000, A is entitled to receive a check for \$1,200.

Example B: B is a single taxpayer who has not yet filed a 2019 return. In 2018, he had Social Security income of \$10,000. As a result, he did not file

a tax return because his income was less than the \$12,000 standard deduction. The IRS will access B's Social Security statement for 2018, and issue a check to B for \$1,200.

Example C: C & E are married with three children. On their 2019 tax return, they reported taxable income of \$60,000 and had a tax liability of \$5,000 before withholding and credits fully eliminated the liability and gave rise to a \$3,000 refund. Nevertheless, C&E will receive a check for \$3,900 from the government as part of the 2020 stimulus payment.

Example D is single and 30 years old. In 2017, D decided to go to graduate school full-time. D goes to school in 2018 and 2019, earns no income, and files no tax return. As a result, D does not receive a check for \$1,200 as part of the stimulus package in 2020. If D files a 2020 tax return, however, D will receive a credit against her tax liability in 2020.

Read more from the IRS

https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/economic-impactpayments-what-you-need-to-know

GENERAL BUDGET ADVICE

Living on a reduced income requires your utmost caution and skill in managing your money. There are many resources to help you, but first you must plan ahead.

- ✓ Set up a realistic budget plan allowing for basic needs such as: food, shelter, utilities and medical care.
- ✓ Prioritize your bills. When you do not have enough money to pay all the bills, pay these first: rent or mortgage, utilities, food and transportation.
- ✓ Before your bills become due, notify your creditors, lenders and/or landlord that you are unemployed and cannot meet your payments. Explain your situation truthfully and ask for a written payment plan or discuss other ways to pay off your obligations.
- ✓ Maintain accurate files. Before mailing your letters, make copies to keep for your files. If you must negotiate over the phone, keep detailed notes including the representative's name, title, and phone number. Follow up any phone conversations in writing.
- ✓ **Stay organized**. Keep everything in one place. Write a summary list of your financial plan for quick reference.
- ✓ Keep your end of the bargain. If you are unable to make agreed upon payments, contact your creditors immediately to renegotiate.

- ✓ Avoid making unnecessary purchases on credit.
- ✓ Get budget counseling if you are having difficulty. For financial counseling, debt management and consumer education, call:
- ✓ If you need help with a consumer problem contact:

LA Attorney General's Consumer Dispute Form
https://www.ag.state.la.us/Form/Consumer/Dispute

Your rights under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act

While debt collectors do have the right to demand payment, and eventually take legal action if necessary, the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA) prohibits any kind of harassment.

The FDCPA applies to any personal, family, or household debt and covers debt collectors who regularly collect debt for others, but not the creditors themselves or their lawyers.

If you find yourself on the receiving end of a collection call, you might wish to know:

- ? When can a collector contact me? Unless you give them permission to do otherwise, debt collectors can only contact you between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. They may not communicate with you by postcard.
- ? **Can collectors contact me at work?** A collector may not contact you at work if they know your employer disapproves.
- ? What constitutes harassment under the FDCPA?
 Collectors may not use profane language or threaten you with violence. In many instances, it prohibits the publication of a list of consumers who allegedly refuse to pay debts. Collectors may not threaten to take your property unless they are actually able to do it.

- ? Can collectors contact my family or friends? Debt collectors can contact other people but only to ask for information on how to locate you. In most cases, the collector may not divulge the reason for the call to anyone other than you or your attorney.
- ? Can I get a collector to stop contacting me? Debt collection agencies are required to honor written requests to stop contacting consumers. Please be aware that sending a "cease and desist" letter does not relieve you of your responsibility. You will still owe the money, and the company may pursue collection efforts.

SAMPLE LETTER TO CREDITORS

Pate:
ear
am temporarily on a reduced income due to the economic impact of COVID-19. I am asking our cooperation during this difficult period.
need to cut back on all my regular payments. I would like to work with you to establish a educed payment. This is the fairest thing I can do under the circumstances. When I return to ork, I will again work with you to establish a plan to catch up on my payments.
hank you for your understanding.
ignature
RINT NAME
ccount Number

Address		