

The hospitality industry in New Orleans has been all but completely shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic. We applaud the efforts of our state and local governments for taking necessary steps for public health and safety of our residents. In response, we have seen a significant outpouring of local support and relief efforts, both small and large: *United Way, The Greater New Orleans Foundation, NOLA Business Alliance* and others have established funds to provide small grants for financial relief. City government has suspended evictions, helped feed residents, and kept utilities from being shut off. Many of our city's restaurants, food co-ops, and urban farms have contributed to food relief efforts. Neighborhood associations, houses of worship, mutual aid groups, and everyday residents of our city are stepping up to do everything they can and more to look after residents in the region.

Noticeably absent from these efforts to provide relief are the two anchor institutions of New Orleans' tourism industry: the Exhibition Hall Authority and New Orleans & Company.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in January 2020, there were 95,300 Leisure and Hospitality workers in greater New Orleans -- almost 20% of the total private employment in the area. Almost all of these workers are now unemployed or under constant threat of losing their jobs and if they are fortunate enough to have it, their health care. The small local businesses, neighborhood stores, and service providers that these workers support will suffer the next wave of economic crisis as their customers dry up.

The Exhibition Hall Authority and New Orleans & Company are sitting on more than \$184 Million in unrestricted net assets which they have accumulated through several city-wide tax programs applied on hotels, motels, and food and beverage purchases. These "rainy day" reserves were amassed through the booming success of the hospitality industry-- an industry that only succeeds and exists because of the work of tens of thousands of New Orleanians and Southeastern Louisianans. Without these workers there is no New Orleans hospitality, no tourism industry, no one to share our unique culture. We understand why these "rainy day" funds exist -- to provide a cushion for our dynamic tourism and convention industry, keeping one of New Orleans' primary economic drivers on safe footing in the event of a disaster. The disaster is here. Now. The industry is shut down.

The musicians, artists, and hospitality and service workers whose often low-wage labor makes our city run don't have a rainy day fund. They need help, and they need it now.

The Exhibition Hall Authority must allocate \$100 Million of their cash reserves to fund direct cash assistance to unemployed hospitality workers. Such a relief effort must be administered in a fair, transparent, and accountable manner and be accessible to all workers in the hospitality industry. All Convention Center workers, including direct employees, employees of companies contracted by the Exhibition Hall Authority, independent contractors, and temporary workers, must receive their full weekly wages until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Exhibition Hall Authority and New Orleans & Company market New Orleans to the world. It's now time for them to make sure New Orleans workers can stay here, stay healthy, and be ready to get back to work when it's time for the world to return to New Orleans.

Marlene Patrick Cooper, President, UNITE HERE Local 23

Erika Zucker, Policy Advocate, Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic

With, and on behalf of 19 community organizations

UNITE HERE Local 23

Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic

International Union of Operating Engineers Local 406

Step Up Louisiana

New Orleans DSA

Indivisible New Orleans

Louisiana Bucket Brigade

New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice

Jewish Voice for Peace New Orleans

Extinction Rebellion New Orleans

New Orleans Abortion Fund

Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center

Housing NOLA

Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance

Louisiana Center for Children's Rights

Puentes New Orleans

Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans

Shift Change

BARE NOLA

Central City Renaissance Alliance

Women With a Vision

571 WORD COUNT