

The Honorable James C. Justice, II, Governor
c/o Brian Abraham, Chief of Staff
State Capitol, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. E
Charleston, WV 25305
Sent via email to brian.r.abraham@wv.gov

The Honorable Craig Blair, Senate President and Lieutenant Governor
Room 229M, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305
Sent via email to craig.blair@wvsenate.gov

The Honorable Roger Hanshaw, House Speaker
Room 228M, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305
Sent via email to roger.hanshaw@wvhouse.gov

February 1, 2021

To: Governor Jim Justice, Senate President Craig Blair, and House Speaker Roger Hanshaw,

As you well know, COVID-19 has hit our state with a public health and economic crisis that has exposed and worsened inequities already present in our state. Increasing numbers of West Virginians are struggling to feed their families, remain in their homes, keep their businesses afloat, and protect their jobs, all while fighting to stay healthy. Growing evidence suggests that these conditions are disproportionately worse for low-income families, people of color, and women.

As you consider legislative priorities and the state budget in the coming weeks, you face a daunting task of balancing the budget as the need for strong, quality public services is greater than ever. As leaders of our great state, you have an important responsibility to uphold the dignity and opportunity of all West Virginians, while keeping in particular mind those who are suffering the most due to the unequal impacts of the pandemic.

This responsibility demands steadfast action and courage to invest more in public services. However, we – the undersigned – are concerned that the state is contemplating counterproductive budget cuts and proposals that would take needed revenue away from public services and programs that those we serve rely upon. We urge you to take bold action to strengthen public support and invest in West Virginia's future. Every dollar spent in uplifting people, communities, small businesses, and local governments is a dollar that will enhance the economy and pay dividends for years to come.

In contrast, budget and revenue cuts will sacrifice West Virginians' safety, health, economic security, and public education, all for a short-term solution. Instead of cuts, we urge that you look to protect revenue to invest in West Virginia's long-term prosperity. We understand that you must balance the state budget. Still, as we reflect on lessons from the Great Recession, it is evident that cuts to public services will only slow-down economic development, in both the public and private sectors, ultimately harming all of us.

We ask that you implement revenue-protecting and raising solutions to preserve and expand the public services that keep our economy and West Virginians afloat right now. Protecting revenue to invest in our state's public services is like giving gas to our economy's engine. Through fearless pro-investment action, you would also usher in a more equitable, modern, and resilient revenue base for the future.

Further, we ask that you reject tax cuts that would take away the state's ability to provide critical public services or that would shift tax responsibility from the wealthy and corporations onto the West Virginia families who've been most impacted by the pandemic.

As leaders of West Virginia's government, we are calling on you to protect vital public services and programs in West Virginia in the upcoming legislative session. Now more than ever, your constituents are aware of the vital role that government plays in public education, health care, public safety, and infrastructure. Cutting revenues through tax cuts, particularly those that benefit the wealthy and corporations at the cost of everyone else, would put those critical public services at risk.

We look forward to working alongside you and fellow policymakers to advocate, on behalf of all West Virginians, for revenue-protecting solutions that promote shared prosperity and dignity. We believe that together we can protect our families, friends, and neighbors' health and economic stability by prioritizing revenue over cuts. Please reject efforts to reduce revenues by enacting regressive tax cuts that force public service cuts, particularly in the wake of a pandemic.

Signed,

American Friends Service Committee
American Heart Association
Call to Action for Racial Equality
Fair Shake Network
Fayette Fair Share
Kanawha Valley National Organization for Women
League of Women Voters of West Virginia
Morgantown/Kingwood Branch of the NAACP
Morgantown National Organization for Women
Mountain State Justice
National Association of Social Workers, West Virginia Chapter
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Planned Parenthood South Atlantic
Rise up WV
TEAM for West Virginia Children
The Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia
West Virginia Association of Counties
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy
West Virginia Citizen Action Education Fund
West Virginia Citizens for Clean Elections
West Virginia Community Action Partnerships
West Virginia Council of Churches
West Virginia Education Association
West Virginia Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Parents Network

West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information and Services

West Virginia Free

West Virginia National Organization of Women

West Virginia Poor Peoples Campaign

West Virginia Rivers Coalitions

West Virginia Working Families Party

West Virginians for Affordable Health Care