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Subject: Workplace Safety

August 10, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom  
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Dear Governor Newsom:

We write to bring your attention to the need for urgent action to create an Emergency Temporary Standard to protect workers from COVID-19 hazards on the job. California needs an enforceable Cal/OSHA standard which both employers and workers can rely upon. The future of our state economy depends on it, as does the health of workers and their families.

As an employee of the CSU, our ability to safely deliver support and services to students is critical. At the system and campus levels, administration is basing the majority of the decisions on the financial position of the institutions over the safety and security of students and employees. It's definitely a difficult balance which is why it is so important that these standards are set by an objective group whose primary expertise and focus is on safety.

We appreciate that Cal/OSHA and the Department of Public Health have worked hard to issue guidance documents to help employers in affected industries who are willing to take specific actions to prevent the spread of COVID. And while Cal/OSHA has standards that employers should follow to prevent injury and illnesses, these are very broad and are not specific on preventative measures for COVID - such as social distancing, quarantining, ventilation, and training on COVID. We must do more to protect workers from getting COVID at work, from spreading it to their coworkers, and from taking it home to their families.

At the CSU, despite requests for social distancing signage, PPE and other safety measures, some essential workers went weeks without hand sanitizer, proper cleaning products and facial masks/coverings. Departments where in-person customer service is required lack plexiglass shields, adequately spaced workstations and/or barriers. Employees working in these high traffic/customer service areas have now tested positive for the virus. Also, there are currently no self-health assessments required for essential workers. Efforts are being made but these actions only attempt to address our fall operations. They do not protect the essential on-site workers who have been actively working on-site since mid-March. We don't believe there is an intent to deprive workers of their safety, only a lack of knowledge and expertise at how that safety is achieved.

Worksafe and the Labor & Employment Committee of the National Lawyers Guild have submitted a petition [https://worksafe.org/file\\_download/inline/8d447350-e065-457f-8c61-aae8b888693e](https://worksafe.org/file_download/inline/8d447350-e065-457f-8c61-aae8b888693e) for an infectious disease standard for all workers. We need science-based standards tailored to COVID-19 hazards, especially for industries outside of health care, because millions of workers in these industries are exposed to COVID hazards on the job, or will be as these industries reopen.

We are devastated, saddened, and scared about the number of Californians who have died. Over 10,000 Californians have now died, and an unknown number of them were infected at work or from work. The pandemic will continue to spread in workplaces - as workers return to work in large numbers. This creates the risk of a second and possibly larger "wave" of the epidemic in coming months, and perhaps again further in the future.

Cal/OSHA has received an unprecedented number of complaints from thousands of workers about COVID hazards. Based on these, as well as many news reports, we believe many employers are ignoring existing guidance. A standard which specifically covers COVID hazards is needed to set a clear, enforceable standard for all employers and to convince reluctant employers to take appropriate action to protect workers and the public.

Please move quickly to enact a strong standard, such as one included in the petition, to ensure that ALL Californians have protections at work. Prompt action will help save lives through reducing the risk of spreading COVID within workplaces, allowing us to reopen the economy while truly minimizing the further spread of the disease. We urge you to embrace this historic opportunity for California to lead the nation on worker health and safety.

Respectfully,

California State University Employees Union

Chapter 308 (Stanislaus), Executive Board Officers

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