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Dear America,

For over six months our country has been under the grips of a raging pandemic that has mercilessly spread across our nation, taking lives and livelihoods without warning or recourse for thousands of workers and families. Amid this crisis, heroes emerged among us—from the health care workers to the first responders to scores of low-paid workers who dutifully continued to do the work that was needed to keep our country and our communities afloat.

For many of us it was the first time that we were ever seen, celebrated or remotely valued. From the domestic workers who work behind closed doors caring for our loved ones to the farmworkers who labor in isolated fields picking the food that we eat to the grocery store workers and delivery people whose names we may never know. The federal government created a new designation for us. We were stamped with the title of “essential workers.” This gave us the ability to continue to go to work as lock-down orders were put in place around the country because it was not safe for people to go out, except those of us who were needed to keep our country from complete collapse.

We know that we are and always have been essential. We know that the corporations where many of us work are profiting immensely during this crisis. We also know that all of our labor should be deemed critical and important no matter where we work, what we do or how much we get paid. Yet, historically, as a direct result of racist policies and exclusions, many of us and our predecessors have faced workplace inequities and injustices for hundreds of years without worthy justification.

Given this reality, we have experienced cognitive dissonance between what we are called, what we have been called on to do and the ways by which we have been left behind by policymakers, corporations, and institutions that benefit from our labor. Thanking us with words is not enough. We demand a radical transformation of our laws and systems toward equity for all workers across sectors.

When we come out of this crisis, we will not accept a reality in which whole groups of workers, many of them women of color and immigrants, are treated as disposable—to be used and abused without workplace protections or benefits worthy of their labor. It has never been right or normal that millions of workers around the United States are denied the most basic labor protections—a minimum wage, overtime pay, fair scheduling, paid sick leave, and the right to unionize, among so many other critical protections.

During this crisis and beyond, we pledge to work together to improve working conditions for all of us. To that end we demand executives and policymakers meet with workers to provide:

- 1. Health and safety protections where we work.**
- 2. Robust premium compensation.**
- 3. The honoring of commitments regarding job quality standards, including collective bargaining agreements for union members.**
- 4. Truly universal paid sick leave and family and medical leave.**
- 5. Protection from retaliation for whistleblowers.**
- 6. An end to carve-outs and loopholes in our labor laws that misclassify workers and exclude others from basic labor protections altogether.**
- 7. Health care security.**
- 8. Affordable child care available for every working family.**
- 9. Treatment of workers as experts.**
- 10. Accountability for companies that shirk their responsibilities to their workers**

Despite the chaos this pandemic has caused, it has also resulted in acute clarity when it comes to uncovering the vast inequities that have existed in our society for far too long. This crisis is playing out like the predictable scenes of a tragic play. No one should be shocked by the fact that hundreds of essential workers have died—essentially sacrificed by the systems that were never set up to protect them. No one should be shocked that so many of us have been excluded from coronavirus relief and the existing safety net. And no one should be shocked that many of us will come out of this crisis even further behind than we were before due to exorbitant medical bills, bankruptcy, and the high cost of housing, among many other factors. But we should all be outraged.

We, America’s essential workers, understand that we have worked tirelessly to save each other and every member of our society during this crisis. We also understand that we will be the ones that will save ourselves as we look forward to the future and the possibility of building a better world where we are all treated with the respect, fairness and dignity that we never should have been denied.

On the occasion of this unique Labor Day, we invite you to join us.

In Solidarity,

Allegra Brown, Amazon Warehouse Worker

Carolyn Davis, Walmart Associate

Crystal Crawford, Nanny

Lindsay Ray, High School Teacher and Union Leader

Ramona C. DeLoera, Farmworker and Mother

Teresa McClatchie, Passenger Service Airport Worker

Paid for by the National Essential Workers Campaign. Visit www.honoressentialworkers.com for more information.