May 13, 2020

The Honorable Brian P. Kemp
Governor
State of Georgia
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Tom C. Rawlings
Director
Georgia Division of Family & Children Services
2 Peachtree St. NW
19th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Governor Kemp and Director Rawlings,

Thank you for your service and dedication to our state during this very difficult time. We know you are working to lessen the economic harm caused by the pandemic while attempting to reduce the spread of the virus and protect as many Georgians as possible.

As a partner in seeking ways to help families survive economically the undersigned organizations are writing to ask for your support in allocating unobligated Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reserve funds to provide limited emergency cash assistance to low income families with children in order to pay rent, utilities, and other bills so that they are able to remain adequately housed.

Georgia has a history of utilizing these funds to provide emergency cash assistance. During the Great Recession Georgia used unobligated TANF reserve funds to establish the Fresh Start Program which provided a one-time crisis payment of up to $3,000 to help families with children meet housing expenses and obtain or retain housing. Moreover, our neighbors in Tennessee are using TANF funds to offer Emergency Cash Assistance that provides two monthly cash payments to families who were employed as of March 11, 2020, and have lost a job or at least half of their earned income due to the COVID-19 emergency.

Federal law empowers Georgia to deploy TANF reserve funds to provide up to four months of non-recurring, short-term (NRST) assistance to very low-income families with children suffering due to a loss of income as a result of the pandemic. The allocation of these funds, currently set aside in an unobligated reserve account, would not require any action or appropriation by the Legislature.

Providing one time short term direct cash assistance to families means they can pay their rent, keep up with needed bills and hopefully weather this crisis, and meet the essential goals of the TANF program. The economic impact to vulnerable families would keep them sheltered, avoid the harm of eviction filings and eviction that are devastating and long lasting, and keep families from ending up homeless or living in emergency shelters, already stretched to meet the demands of the pandemic. It would have a significant positive benefit for landlords able to meet their financial obligations, pay their mortgages, and bring money back into hard hit communities suffering economically.
To best leverage these dollars, we urge you to adjust the definition of need for NRST support to include families with children earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level ($3,620 monthly for a family of three) who otherwise meet the requirements of TANF, including asset limits.

Providing this type of direct assistance to families with children is a strategic and powerful one time boost to help keep families from falling into homelessness or other desperate circumstances. Families will be able to pay their rent, utilizing these funds to keep up with bills and satisfy the needs of landlords, while maintaining stable housing to ensure some level of stability for young children engaging in distance learning and helping to stem the spread of the virus by ensuring families do not end up on the street or in a shelter.

Thank you for your consideration of our request to use Georgia’s unobligated TANF reserves to meet the needs of Georgia’s poorest families with children who have been hardest hit by the pandemic and fulfill the essential purposes of the TANF program.

Respectfully,

9to5
Anderson Smith Consulting
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta
Atlanta Bicycle Coalition
Atlanta CareerRise
Atlanta Community Food Bank
Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation
Betty and Davis Fitzgerald Foundation
BECAUSE Georgia
Center for Black Women’s Wellness
Center for Civic Innovation
Center for Community Progress
Center for Pan Asian Community Services, Inc.
CHRIS 180, Inc.
Circles of West Georgia
Columbia Presbyterian Church
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Corners Outreach
Deep Center
Emmaus House
Enterprise Community Partners
Faith in Public Life
Feminist Women’s Health Center
Fulton Atlanta Community Action Authority
Gateway Center
GEEARS
Georgia Advancing Communities Together, Inc.
Georgia Black Constructors Association
Georgia Budget & Policy Institute
Georgia Coalition for the People’s Agenda
Georgia Conservation Voters
Georgia NAACP
Georgia Shift
Georgia STAND UP
Georgia Stand-Up
Georgia State Representative, House District 89
Georgia Supportive Housing Association, Inc.
Georgians for a Healthy Future
Groundswell
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition
HouseATL
Interfaith Children’s Movement, Inc.
International Rescue Committee
Latin American Association
Latino Community Fund Inc.
Los Ninos Primero
Nat’l Association Of Minority Contractors
National Domestic Workers Alliance
New American Pathways
Nicholas House
Our House
Partnership for Southern Equity
Path Project
Peoplestown Revitalization Corp
Ser Familia, Inc.
SOSSI- Saving Our Sons & Sisters International
St. Vincent de Paul Georgia
Statewide Independent Living Council–GA
Step Up Savannah, Inc.
The Will To Win, LLC
TransFormation Alliance
U.S. Green Building Council
United Way of Greater Atlanta
Urban League of Greater Atlanta
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, Inc.
Women of Wonder Outreach Ministry