



May 14, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Interior Design Profession's Policy Priorities for Future Congressional COVID-19 Action

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, McCarthy and Schumer:

My name is Bryan Soukup, and I represent the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and our nearly 25,000 members, firms, and member companies. As the American people weather this global pandemic, I write to you to encourage greater economic relief for our nation's design and construction industry and, specifically, the thousands of small and sole practitioner interior design businesses across our country. I also implore you to take this opportunity to assess the needs of our nation's current and future vertical infrastructure in response to lessons learned from COVID-19. Our members are and will continue to be on the frontlines of assessing, redesigning, and rebuilding these structures.

The American Society of Interior Designers traces its roots back more than 80 years and serves the full range of the interior design profession and practice through the Society's programs, networks, and advocacy. Our nearly 25,000 members cover all specialties, including workplace, healthcare, retail and hospitality, education, institutional, and residential practice, students, and corporate industry partners. We spend approximately 90% of our lives in interior environments, so our members use evidence-based and human-centric design to affect comfort, accessibility, safety, wellness, and sustainability.

The American Society of Interior Designers and our members would like to offer several urgent policy priorities for the next round of COVID-19 relief:

- 1) Expand unemployment relief provided by the CARES Act beyond July 31, 2020.
- 2) Suspend the self-employment tax.

The core of the interior design profession and industry are small businesses and self-employed businesses. 83% of interior design firms are small businesses of four or fewer employees and 80% of firms are women and/or minority-owned. These sole practitioner firms and shops are reeling from the effects of COVID-19 and subsequent stay-at-home orders.

- 3) Ensure student loan debt cancellation.



When COVID-19 passes and Americans get back to their stores, businesses, and corporate offices and when hotels, airports, and government buildings reopen, it will be interior designers who redesign these spaces to mitigate or avoid the next pandemic.

Our health is influenced by everything we touch in these interior environments. Disease-causing pathogens, like those that spread COVID-19, can be transferred from person to person, but also through everyday objects like office door handles, restroom grab bars, and schoolroom desks. It is critical to have interior environments that can protect our health by reducing pathogen transmission. Interior designers specify materials and finishes in 90% of residential and commercial construction and renovations and these professionals will be key in protecting the US against the next virus.

The skills learned by interior design students in college programs are essential to rebuilding and redesigning America's vertical infrastructure in the wake of COVID-19.

The next relief package must include student loan debt cancellation and long-term relief for essential service providers, like interior designers and other construction professionals, and all struggling borrowers shouldering record levels of student loan debt.

- 4) Provide grants to improve remote work capabilities for essential workers to enable compliance with COVID-19 public health precautions.
- 5) Recognize the essential role that the design and building workforce play in responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- 6) Investing in vertical infrastructure can be among the first set of measures to invigorate economies because governments can directly stimulate demand and job creation, so Congress should make heavy investments in vertical infrastructure, including:
 - a. Investing in the renovation and retrofitting of schools, community centers, libraries and other civic buildings to improve occupant safety, health outcomes, and reduce energy consumption, especially in underserved communities;
 - b. Providing financial support for retrofitting affordable housing, including multifamily rental properties, to make them more energy efficient, accessible, and healthier;
 - c. Approving funding to support adapting buildings into temporary healthcare facilities;
 - d. Investing in upgrades to federal facilities to make them both more energy efficient and healthier;
 - e. Conducting research into the most promising technologies, products and materials that improve occupant health and reduce transmission of contagious disease;
 - f. Providing grant and funding opportunities to organizations like ASID, our member firms, and our member university personnel that are conducting research into the most promising technologies, products, and materials that improve occupant health and reduce transmission of contagious disease;



- g. Providing additional funding to train building sector personnel, including design, operations, and maintenance staff, in core competencies for maintaining occupant health and safety in buildings.
- h. Providing grants for online learning and training for design and building personnel on the front lines of the response in areas such as disaster preparedness, operations and maintenance, building safety, materials, and space planning;
- i. Funding federal sector building personnel to access much needed training programs including those identified by the Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act and those provided by the American Society of Interior Designers; and,
- j. Recognizing the demographic challenges in the current building, trades, and code administration workforce and creating incentives to bring additional younger workers into these critical job roles.

As United States Senator Cory Booker stated on the Senate floor on March 20, 2020, “the mom and pop pizza joint to small interior design shops to barber shops, are all trying to determine how they can keep themselves afloat when their doors are closed, how they can deal with their fixed costs.” Interior designers and firms are hurting and we ask you, as our elected leaders, to remember these small businesses and the important work they do to create safe, healthy, functional, and sustainable buildings as you navigate the process to provide much needed relief to an ailing nation.

Sincerely,



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