

Testimony of Martha Rodriguez

House Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures

“Supporting Workers and Families Through the Tax Code to Jumpstart the U.S. Economy in the COVID-19 Pandemic”

June 19, 2020

Good morning Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Martha Rodriguez. I live in Renton, Washington, and I'm a proud member of MomsRising. I'm also a bilingual early childhood educator and mother of two incredible children -- a daughter who is 11, and a son who is 8. The coronavirus pandemic has devastated my family financially. I know firsthand how urgent it is that we provide families immediate financial relief during this uncertain time, as well as make changes to our tax code and build upon the supports that help struggling families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Before the pandemic, my husband and I each worked two jobs to make ends meet. My husband worked as a bartender as well as a food preparer in schools. I worked as a bilingual instructor in a preschool and at an afterschool program. We worked long, hard hours to provide for our children. We lived paycheck to paycheck and were struggling to build up our savings.

Then, in mid-March, our workplaces suddenly closed due to the pandemic. I lost both of my jobs on the same day my husband lost his job as a bartender. Overnight, my husband and I went from having four jobs to just one. Suddenly, we were not only worried about contracting this terrible new virus; we were also worried about how we would cover basic expenses like food and our mortgage.

We applied for unemployment insurance, but I was not approved because I had been working part-time. My husband still has his job as a food preparer, so his unemployment benefits are meager. He still works about 20 hours each week, but that job alone is not nearly enough to pay our bills.

We're not sure what to do. The job market is very tough right now, and we worry about public-facing jobs that would put us at risk for contracting the virus. Still, we looked into getting jobs at Costco or Target, some of the few employers that are hiring in our community. But my

husband's schedule changes every week. It would be very hard to find a second job that is willing to schedule him around his first.

Meanwhile, my kids are home from school, and one of us needs to be here to care for them. There's no way we could afford child care. As an educator, I'm working very hard to homeschool them right now. It's important to me that we do everything we can to keep them on track.

This situation has caused a financial crisis for my family. We want to be working, but we're not sure when we'll be able to. We are relying on food banks. Our mortgage lender has given us a three-month deferral, but once that runs out, we'll owe them a lot of money that we simply don't have. We are terrified and don't know what we're going to do when that extra time runs out.

The direct payment checks that were issued in April were a huge source of short-term relief for us. We used them to keep up with bills so we're not facing a mountain of debt at the end of this pandemic--whenever that will be. But while these checks were helpful, our mortgage alone is about \$1,500/month. Families like mine are struggling and we don't have many options. We need additional relief if we are going to get back on our feet.

In such an uncertain time, improving and expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit would also be a huge help to my family. We can't know what our income will look like over the course of the next year. I have been laid off permanently from one of my jobs and the other is looking at cuts. I am unsure if my husband will be able to return to work as a bartender. So when we do return to work, it's hard to say where we'll be working, what our wages will be, or how secure those jobs will be. Improvements made in the HEROES Act, like increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit, and making it fully refundable would give us peace of mind that our challenges this year won't hurt us for years to come.

All of these measures would go a long way in helping parents like us, as well as boosting our hurting communities and struggling economy. To recover from the pandemic, we need to address the needs of working families first and foremost. As you discuss strategies for supporting families through the tax code, I hope you will remember my story. Thank you.