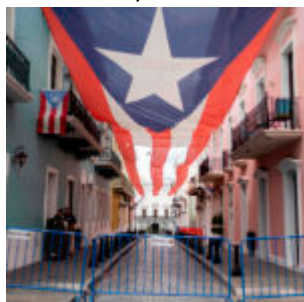


Puerto Rican Educators: Fighting for Health and Safety in the Face of Covid-19

March 23, 2020



Barricades block the entrance to the Governor's mansion known as La Fortaleza in San Juan, Puerto Rico on March 18, 2020. - On Sunday March 15, Puerto Rico's Governor Wanda Vazquez imposed a curfew and ordered the shutdown of most businesses in hopes of slowing down the spread of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19). (Photo by Ricardo ARDUENGO / AFP)

This joint statement by the Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico and the National Union of Educators and Education Workers addressed the Covid-19 crisis as the island continues to suffers in the wake of hurricanes, earthquakes, and neoliberal austerity imposed from Washington, D.C. Originally published at FMPRblog, translated and republished by No Borders New with permission.

In the face of the global coronavirus health crisis and the Puerto Rican government's decision to implement a national lockdown of public services and all shops, as well as establishing a curfew, we put forth the following proposals that must be addressed in order to develop genuine solutions.

1. The salary of all workers must be guaranteed, including public sector workers, companies with state contracts, and private firms, regardless of their status, during the curfew which will shutter all businesses and shops. If private companies deny workers their wages, immediate economic aid must be provided for those workers, for example, unemployment payments. We must not have poor and working-class families quarantined in their homes without the income

they need to survive. Remember, our current administration approved the so-called labor reform that eliminated, or substantially reduced, accumulated days for sick leave and vacations for workers in private companies. Now is the time to reconsider the effects of this reform and repeal it.

2. Access to Puerto Rico's ports must be denied to all vessels, with the exception of those carrying food, medicines, and medical equipment under a strict safety and hygiene protocol.
3. Airports must control travelers' access to our island, allowing only doctors and health personnel who come to work during the emergency access, along with Puerto Rican residents returning home. All residents entering the island must be automatically quarantined in addition to having a screening test at the airport, which includes taking their temperature and documenting their travel and health history.
4. Supermarkets, pharmacies, and gas stations that remain open must have thermometers available so that, as part of the protocol at each shift change, before and after work, employees' temperatures are taken. Employees must wear gloves at all times and wash their hands when entering and leaving work, or when they take off their gloves.
5. Medical science campuses can prepare students as an auxiliary emergency medical teams to confront the virus outbreak, as has been suggested by Harvard University.
6. Cuba has enough antiviral drugs to treat* this pandemic. They should be obtained for our national population, yet they are prohibited due to the U.S. embargo of Cuba.
7. The coronavirus test must be free for the entire population.
8. A moratorium must be declared on all payment of mortgages, personal, debts, and car loans. During this emergency, there should be no disconnection of electric power or residential water services.
9. Speech, occupational, and physical therapists should contact the parents or guardians of students in their care in order to provide them with weekly exercises they can work on with children at home.
10. The current administration of Puerto Rico committed to providing laptops to each teacher and student and this promise must be fulfilled. This equipment must be delivered to our country's children and youth so that they can work remotely and use online platforms such as Edmodo.
11. Prior to restarting the school semester, and to prior to restarting work in all public agencies and private business and commercial enterprises, all work areas must be disinfected, sanitized, and equipped with the necessary products. In the case of public schools, they must hire a minimum of one nurse per campus and designate a nurse's office.
12. In the face of the pandemic, countries such as China have been producing medicines in their own pharmaceutical companies. The government of Puerto Rico should reopen pharmaceutical companies that have been recently closed down, since they have trained employees to carry out such work. They must offer retraining using Workforce Investment Act funds. In addition, while research is currently underway for possible vaccines and antivirals, Puerto Rico could produce such drugs in small and large quantities for medical trials. This measure is extremely important because if the coronavirus expands and proliferates, all these medications will be critical. Apart from benefiting public health, reopening pharmaceutical companies would be a source of income and employment for workers in our country who have been laid off. It is time for the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO) and the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DDEC) to reopen those factories.
13. Telecommunications companies must provide basic internet and telephone services free of charge. This can be done through the Telecommunications Bureau, Comcast is currently doing so in the US.
14. The hiring of additional nurses for schools and equipment to provision their offices, the hiring of additional custodians, and any other measures that are not budgeted should be paid from the Emergency Fund, or from the General Fund reserve.

**According to Telesurtv.net, Interferon Alpha 2B, manufactured in Cuba, “is currently used in vulnerable and health care personnel as a preventive measure, as well as in patients with COVID-19 in the form of a nebulization, as it is a quick route to reach the lungs and act in the early stages of the infection, the officials highlighted.” For clarity, it is important to point out that it is neither a “cure” or a “vaccine” against Covid-19.*

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