

Marcos Aranda remarks

U.S. House of Representatives, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
Select Subcommittee Member Briefing on “*Heroes of the Coronavirus
Crisis: Protecting Frontline and Essential Workers During the Pandemic*”
May 21, 2020

Good morning. I would like to thank Chairman Clyburn, Ranking Member Scalise, and all the Members of the Subcommittee for allowing me to share my story with you today.

My name is Marcos Aranda. I am a janitor and proud member of SEIU Local 87.

As a janitor for the last 10 years, I can tell you that my job has always been essential to protecting the public's health and safety even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has made it harder for janitors to do our jobs safely. We are coming into frequent contact with objects touched that could be contaminated with coronavirus. I use regular latex gloves and a dust mask, but nothing medical grade. I'm lucky, there are many janitors out there who work without PPE.

We now have to make sure we disinfect every frequently touched surface from phones to elevator buttons to microwave handles. We do a detailed job to make sure that people coming into work in our building during this crisis stay safe.

I know firsthand that it's easy for janitors to come into contact with this virus, but it's harder to deal with the consequences.

My coworker came to me recently for help when he was sick at work. It turned out that he had contracted coronavirus.

I did what I could in that moment and got him help. This took a huge emotional toll. I stayed home for two days afterwards but then I had to return to work. Janitors don't have the option of working from home and many janitors do not have paid sick leave and if they stay home, they don't get paid. I'm lucky that I have a union and we fought for our paid sick days.

Now when I go to work, I'm not only worried about my own health. I'm worried about my family's health too.

I was born and raised in San Francisco, where I live with my family, a big family I should say.

My wife and I live with our six kids, my mom, my sister and her two kids.

Thankfully, no one in our big family has been infected, but COVID-19 is already hurting working families like mine without getting us sick.

Raising our big family in San Francisco was a challenge on two paychecks before the pandemic.

And then my wife was laid off in March, just as San Francisco's Stay at Home order went into place.

Now I'm trying to raise our family on my paycheck alone. And the pandemic has made this even tougher. When the kids were in school we could count on the school lunch program. But that help isn't available right now and the cost of covering those extra meals adds up.

It's also a challenge with other expenses -- we're doing so many more loads of laundry to disinfect masks and our clothes to make sure we don't bring COVID-19 back into our home and to keep my children and family as safe as possible.

But we're cutting corners where we can. Recently we got into a car accident. Luckily no one was hurt but the car was totaled. And right now with so much uncertainty we've decided to make do without a car.

No one knew what to expect when our families first went into quarantine. I was actually happy about having the kids around more. We normally have different schedules. Because I work nights they are at school when I'm home and I don't have a chance to see them enough.

Today, I worry about feeding them, keeping them healthy and making sure they have what they need in the future. And my story isn't unique. I heard of union janitors like me, over 25,000 across the country, who have been laid off despite being essential. And my company just laid off 200 workers in one day. I have no idea if I'll have a job in a week or two. Many parents working in essential jobs are also worried about the next few weeks, months and years because of this pandemic.

Now more than ever we need Congress to take action to protect all workers by:

- Requiring higher pay during this crisis for ALL working people who are putting their health at risk to go into work.
- Making sure we have sufficient PPE.
- Protecting our right to speak out about unsafe job conditions and respecting our right to join together in a union.
- Extending the \$600 unemployment benefit boost until this crisis is truly over. My family is only able to hold things together because of this extra help.
- And making sure that every worker – with no exceptions – has paid sick days if they are sick, self-isolating, or caring for loved ones. People who are exposed to COVID-19 or someone with symptoms like I was shouldn't be forced to go to work because they simply can't afford not to—they should be given the option to self-quarantine and get a test. This keeps us all safe.