

Ablemarle/Charlottesville Region Fair Treatment Charter for Frontline Workers

The novel coronavirus highlights conditions that are, sadly, not novel at all: low-income individuals, especially individuals of color, are suffering disproportionately, both physically and financially. These health and income inequities—which were pre-existing conditions long before COVID-19—will persist long after the pandemic subsides unless we are as intentional in addressing inequities as we were in creating and sustaining them.

As the Commonwealth of Virginia enters a new phase of COVID response, we should focus our recovery efforts not on restoring the old economy but on rebuilding an equitable economy—a healthy economy—intentionally constructed on a foundation of racial justice.

The gradual reopening of this economy will depend on front line workers. In Charlottesville and the surrounding counties these low wage and essential workers are disproportionately African American and Latinx.¹

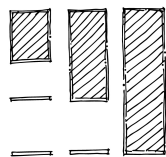
To achieve an equitable economy, public and private employers must recognize, fairly compensate, and protect the health of employees who risk losing their lives to pursue their livelihoods.. A healthy economy, which values the well-being of all of its workers, is both more just and more robust than an economy that compels workers to accept below subsistence wages in order to survive. We have an opportunity for our region to emerge from COVID-19 recovery with an economy that is more just and equitable than it was before the Commonwealth shut down. This means ensuring safe and equitable conditions for frontline workers and it means making sure that the voices of frontline workers infuse every plan. Community-based advocates from the Equity Center Local Steering Committee and UVA President's Council on Community-University Partnerships helped build the list of just employment practices below, and Network2Work@PVCC is working to animate these as a set of just employment standards for which local employers could get certified.

Just Employment Practices

1. Health and Safety Protections:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is made available to all at no cost to employees and is permitted to be worn.
- COVID-19 testing is free and easily accessible.
- Stress reduction/Mental health support is readily available. Ideally, these services will be community-based, easily accessible, and delivered in a way to minimize stigma.

¹ For more on who constitutes our regional frontline workforce, see: https://virginiaequitycenter.github.io/cvilleequity_covid/frontline/



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2. **COVID training to protect essential workers:** Workers and managers are educated on risks and safety measures, and managers are educated on how to consider equity in making and enforcing policies that protect their workers.
3. **Robust Premium Compensation:** During a pandemic, workers at risk deserve more than a living wage. Essential workers receive compensation that acknowledges the critical contribution they make to our collective health and the economy. Essential workers need hazard pay; this means extra pay for performing extra dangerous duties.
4. **Paid Sick Leave for Essential Workers:** Frontline workers are provided paid sick leave. These essential workers not only contract the virus at higher rates, but are more likely to infect others because they feel like they cannot miss a day of work. They come to work sick and go home sick.
5. **Flexible Work Schedules and Arrangements:** Employers are flexible with work schedules, and other work arrangements as we attempt to reopen the economy, understanding that things cannot go back to “normal.”
6. **Open Hiring Practices:** Employers rebuilding their workforce use open hiring practices, which speeds the hiring process, improves retention and avoids the threat of implicit or explicit bias by hiring qualified workers on a first-come, first served basis. Those who want the job get the job.
7. **Pipeline Support for Former Frontline Workers:** Workers who are not willing to risk returning to a frontline position should be provided fair compensation and support by allowing them to continue collecting unemployment benefits, while also connecting them to training/resources on other jobs within employer networks.

Just Community Commitments:

Government, quasi-governmental and social service institutions must also acknowledge the collective imperative to support our frontline workers through the provision of:

8. **Wrap Around Services During Illness:** When workers get sick, they must be able to recover safely without infecting others. Infected workers will have access to housing and other essentials that allow them to more easily self-isolate while they recover.
9. **Child and Family Care:** This is crucial as public schools and daycare centers remain closed. Child care needs to be affordable, provide high-quality early educational experiences and might require creative solutions—i.e. using schools as safe places for cooperative or small business owned childcare to operate and subsidizing employment,

rather than just unemployment, for jobs that society values but the economy does not, such as child care.

10. **Provide Accessible, Safe, Reliable Transit:** CAT and JAUNT have demonstrated best practices in providing safe, free transit to frontline workers during the shelter-in-place, but as the economy re-opens frontline workers must continue to have access to safe, reliable, free transit options.
11. **Affordable health care is available to all frontline workers and their families during the crisis.**
12. **Create a Regional Frontline Worker Rights Commission:** In order to ensure that essential workers voices are centered in the expression of their needs during the pandemic, a regional commission (populated by frontline workers themselves) should be created as a place for dialogue and ongoing advocacy for workers' rights.