March 23, 2020

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| The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Leader  United States Senate  317 Russell Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Marco Rubio, Chairman  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  284 Russell Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Charles Schumer, Leader  United States Senate  322 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Ben Cardin, Ranking Member  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  509 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |

Dear Senators Cardin, McConnell, Rubio, and Schumer:

On behalf of the American Booksellers Association, the not-for-profit trade association of independent bookstores across the country, I am writing to urge you to make the financial plight of small businesses your first priority. Small businesses are the drivers of the economy, and if small businesses close down due to government inaction, it will send a ripple effect through the economy that could last for years.

It is simply inexcusable that, at a time when the government is ordering businesses to shut their doors, congressional leadership would hold up any legislation that could allow small businesses to do their part and protect our economy at the same time.

**Our bookstore members simply cannot wait weeks for a solution; they need action today.**We urge congress immediately to put aside partisan differences for the greater good and pass a bill *today* that will ensure there are small businesses *tomorrow*.

The financial reality of a bookstore, where even a successful store might only generate a 2 percent net profit, means that the impact of a pandemic such as COVID-19 can have a catastrophic economic impact. Demanding that bookstores shut their doors “temporarily” could easily lead to them shutting down permanently if the government does not provide some form of fiscal grant to weather this storm.

This doesn’t just impact bookstores, however -- when a small business shuts down, it impacts the overall economy as well.

Small businesses are the engines of our economy. Bricks-and-mortar retailers employ 47 people for every $10 million in sales, according to an analysis by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance of U.S. Census data. (If chain retailers are removed from the data, leaving only independent retailers, the figure is even higher -- 57 jobs.) If COVID-19 forces the closure of countless retailers, the ripple effect it would have on the overall economy could be devastating and long-lasting.

With that in mind, on behalf of ABA member bookstores, I am asking that you:

* **Provide small businesses with grants NOT loans.** I urge you to provide financial grants for small businesses that must temporarily close due to social distancing measures and limitations on crowd capacity for recreational and social gatherings. And to ensure that small businesses receive their grants quickly, I ask that these grants be administered by local lenders, in whatever way this is possible. These grants or forgivable loans should cover all staff, including those who were laid off or furloughed any time on or after March 1.   
    
  A small business should be able to use these grants, or forgivable loans, on overhead, such as payroll, occupancy, and frankly, whatever ensures the business weathers this unprecedented crisis.   
    
  Importantly, booksellers that are forced to take out an SBA loan in the interim as they wait for congress to act should be allowed to transition any such loan into a grant or unforgivable loan.
* **Allow bookstores to supply their local community in a safe manner that does not threaten the spread of the COVID-19 virus.** It is important to understand the role booksellers play in supplying educators at both the K-12 and university level, as well as providing materials to quarantined people who do not have internet access, whether because of income or other reasons. Toward that end, bookstore owners should be allowed to stay open in some skeletal capacity (e.g., curbside pickup) in a manner that does not threaten public health, or the health of staff, to ensure the community has access to important materials.
* **Issue rebate checks sooner** **rather than later**. Because of state and federal directives ordering businesses to shut down, people are hurting today. Few workers can wait until July or August to receive rebate checks. I am asking that the federal government begin issuing checks to citizens immediately upon passage of any law that authorizes rebates.
* **Please urge our state’s governor to enact sales tax relief measures immediately for small businesses**. California and Maryland have already enacted these with executive orders.
* **Guarantee everyone (including the uninsured) have access to COVID-19 diagnostic testing** **and treatment** at no cost to the consumer.

It is crucial that you protect Main Street during this time of crisis. The Great Recession of 2008 provided us with a lesson as to the kind of ripple effect the closing of one business can have on the local economy.

As [*Time*](http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1921445,00.html) reported in 2009, “a single lost job becomes infectious, combining with others and spreading through family, neighborhood and community. Widespread cutbacks in spending by families mean lower demand for businesses and lower tax revenues for the government. This belt-tightening means fewer car sales and thus fewer jobs for car-part makers. It means less government spending on infrastructure and other public services, including economic development.... it can mean a permanent drop in earning power and standard of living — a reversal of the American Dream.” This is no less true today, and what happened during the Great Recession should be our cautionary tale.

It is of the utmost importance that financial relief includes fiscal grants for Main Street retailers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Allison K Hill  
Chief Executive Officer  
American Booksellers Association

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| The Honorable James Risch  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  483 Russell Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Maria Cantwell  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  511 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Rand Paul  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  167 Russell Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  506 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |

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| The Honorable Tim Scott  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  104 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Ed Markey  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  255 Dirksen Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Joni Ernst  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  730 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Cory Booker  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  717 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |

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| The Honorable James Inhofe  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  205 Russell Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Chris Coons  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  218 Russell Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Todd Young  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  185 Dirksen Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Mazie Hirono  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  713 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |

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| The Honorable John Kennedy  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  416 Russell Senate Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Tammy Duckworth  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  524 Hart Senate Office Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Mitt Romney  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  124 Russell Senate Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Jacky Rosen  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  144 Russell Senate Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |

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| The Honorable Josh Hawley  United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  212 Russell Senate Building  Washington, D.C. 20510 |  |
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