March 23, 2020

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| The Honorable Mitch McConnell, LeaderUnited States Senate317 Russell Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Marco Rubio, ChairmanUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship284 Russell Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Charles Schumer, LeaderUnited States Senate322 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Ben Cardin, Ranking MemberUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship509 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, 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%2C8599%2C1921445%2C00.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 Rand PaulUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship167 Russell Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Jeanne ShaheenUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship506 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 |

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| The Honorable Tim ScottUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship104 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Ed MarkeyUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship255 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Joni ErnstUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship730 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Cory BookerUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship717 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 |

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| The Honorable Todd YoungUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship185 Dirksen Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Mazie HironoUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship713 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 |

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| The Honorable John KennedyUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship416 Russell Senate BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Tammy DuckworthUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship524 Hart Senate Office BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 |
| The Honorable Mitt RomneyUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship124 Russell Senate BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 | The Honorable Jacky RosenUnited States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship144 Russell Senate BuildingWashington, D.C. 20510 |

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