March 13, 2020

Dear NOLSW Members:

I am reaching out to all of you to talk about NOLSW’s response to the Coronavirus. As a union, we care about our communities, particularly the most vulnerable people within those communities. Our members dedicate their lives to empowering, lifting-up and serving people within our communities that others too often overlook. With this in mind, we want to take an aggressive approach to how we respond to the risks posed by the Coronavirus.

As we understand it now, the risks for most healthy individuals, even if they contract Coronavirus, are low. The primary concern with the Coronavirus is for the more susceptible members of the population, those who are older or who have compromised immune systems. However, with very little testing available and with individuals in a position to transmit the virus without knowing they have it, even healthy people are at risk of inadvertently passing it on to someone who is in a higher risk category. We want to be responsible for how we interact with others in our community.

NOLSW Regional Organizers engage in substantial travel in the course of their work which creates significant opportunities for exposure to and transmission of the virus. In order to reduce the risk to them and to all of the members with whom they come in contact, NOLSW is suspending travel for NOLSW Regional Organizers for the next two weeks. Organizers will still be available to work with you by email, phone, and video conference call but for the next two weeks, we will suspend in-person meetings. We will re-assess the situation at that time to determine if the travel suspension needs to be extended.

In addition to limiting travel of Regional Organizers, our National Office located in New York City, will be closed for the next two weeks to eliminate staff travel via public transportation. This precaution will result in delays in getting out expense reimbursement checks and unit replenishment checks, we appreciate your patience and understanding as we take this measure to protect our National Office staff and their families.

We also encourage all local units to take pro-active steps to reduce the risks to members and clients. Within the union, please evaluate the necessity of in-person union meetings. In the workplace, reach out to management to negotiate emergency plans to address and reduce the risks from Coronavirus. Closely monitor and follow the CDC Coronavirus Prevention Recommendations and CDC Guidance for Workplace Safety, but also monitor and follow your local health department recommendations related to your specific locality.

Most employers have been responsive to this evolving situation and are working with units to develop plans to address this ever-changing situation. Please consider the following suggestions in developing your local response plans:

1. **Follow personal prevention recommendations.** Individuals should follow the recommended guidelines to reduce transmission including frequent hand-washing with soap for at
least 20 seconds, use of alcohol-based hand-sanitizer, frequent cleaning of hard surfaces, covering coughs and sneezes, and maintaining a distance of six feet between people.

2. **Workers should be encouraged and supported to stay home as needed.** Workers should consider not only their health but the health of co-workers and clients when making decisions about whether or not to come to work. Employers need to implement procedures that allow for liberal use of flexible and remote work policies for any workers who are exhibiting symptoms of illness, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for a communicable disease, or have a compromised immune systems. Employers should allow for liberal use of sick leave and grant additional leave as necessary to take financial calculations out of the equation for decisions to come to or stay away from the office.

3. **Workers need to be able to care for children if schools close.** Workers should be able to use sick leave and remote work to care for children who are home as a result of school closures even if the child is not sick.

4. **Workers should be made whole if they are forced to miss work as a result of a mandated quarantine.** Local units should try to negotiate additional administrative leave for absences as a result of mandated quarantine by a health department official or medical professional.

5. **Keep workplaces clean.** Implement enhanced cleaning procedures for the offices and communal areas. Employers also need to provide generous quantities of hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and tissues.

6. **Consider the necessity of in-person meetings.** Employers should consider cancelling any non-essential in-person meetings, conferences or gatherings of people. If such activities are not cancelled, Employers should provide options for staff to participate remotely.

7. **Comply with expert recommendations.** Employers should follow all recommendations and precautions as outlined by the CDC and local health departments.

8. **Office closures.** In the event that an office location is closed as a containment measure, employees should receive administrative leave for such closures and not be docked pay or leave time.

9. **Community Advocacy.** We should ask employers to be proactive in advocating with local courts and administrative agencies to suspend hearings or provide for liberal continuances to protect both workers and clients.

Please reach out to your Regional Organizer for additional guidance on how to advocate for members during this unprecedented global health crisis. We will get through this together.

In Solidarity,

**Pam**

Pamela L. Smith, President  
NOLSW, UAW Local 2320