

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader, United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2020

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your efforts to provide critical relief to address the ongoing public health and economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic. As you continue to advance legislation we, the undersigned Black Lung Association representatives, ask you to support miners with black lung disease, working miners, and our communities. We ask for your support as not only do we or our family members suffer from black lung disease, but with compromised lungs we are now among the most vulnerable to severe complications from COVID-19.

In early March, the National Mining Association requested that Congress cut the black lung excise tax that funds the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund (BLDTF) in half. The BLDTF provides critical health benefits and disability payments to those of us who suffer from black lung disease, a preventable but incurable occupational disease acquired from our exposure to dust while working in coal mines. The BLDTF is millions of dollars in debt. Maintaining the Black Lung Excise Tax is critical for those of us that depend on the BLDTF.

We ask not only that you maintain the current rate of the tax, but that you prioritize extending the rate at its current level for the next decade, as it is set to be reduced by half at the end of this year. In addition, we ask for your support in urging the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) to develop emergency standards to protect working miners.

Though the vast majority of Black Lung Association members are no longer working, our family and community members continue to work each day in the mines during this pandemic, providing power for our country in this time of need. In March, the United Mine Workers of America as well as the National Coalition of Black Lung and Respiratory Disease Clinics wrote letters to Assistant Secretary Zatezalo recommending that MSHA take immediate action to implement additional emergency safeguards in the mines to protect miners from COVID-19. Typical mining practices put miners in close contact with one another and require that they share equipment. The implementation of emergency safeguards is critical to protect all working miners from contracting the virus, many of whom already suffer from black lung disease making them particularly vulnerable.

Last, we ask for continued support for those in our communities who are affected by the economic crisis that accompanies this pandemic. The CARES Act has provided vital support for small businesses, direct cash assistance to Americans, and measures to help individuals and families who have lost income access safety net programs like unemployment and SNAP benefits. We ask for your continued support for such measures so that the businesses that anchor our communities, and the hard-working Americans those businesses depend on, can weather this storm.

We sacrificed our lungs and our health to feed our families and power America. The COVID-19 pandemic is a new hazard that threatens our health and the health of working miners. We urge you to protect mine workers, protect the black lung excise tax and the BLDTF, and to provide support for our local businesses, and our hard-working families, neighbors, and friends.

Sincerely,

National Black Lung Association
Jimmy Moore, President

Black Lung Association of Southeastern Kentucky
Rudell Collins, Vice President
Patty Amburgey, Secretary
William McCool, Committee Member
Edward Banks, Committee Member
Richard Neal Yonts, Committee Member

East Kentucky Coalfield Black Lung Association
Barry Johnson, President

Women of Black Lung, Kentucky/Virginia
Patty Amburgey
Alice Hayes
Cheryl Banks
Marie Coleman

Black Lung Association of Southwest Virginia, Chapter 1
Dean Vance, President

Black Lung Association of Southwest Virginia, Chapter 2
Bethel Brock, President
Vonda Robinson, Coordinator

Boone County Black Lung Association, West Virginia
Danny Hager, President
Kim Huffman, Vice President

Fayette County Black Lung Association, West Virginia
Gary Hairston, President

Kanawha County Black Lung Association, West Virginia
Jerry Coleman, President

McDowell County Black Lung Association, West Virginia
Mike Hairston, President

Mercer County Black Lung Association, West Virginia
Harold Michelson, President

Nicholas County Black Lung Association, West Virginia
Arvin Hanshaw, President

Wyoming County Black Lung Association, West Virginia
Brenda Ellis, Vice President
Judith Riffe, Secretary