



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Critical Protections Passed Protecting Workers Against COVID-19

Emergency temporary standards mandate common-sense protections for Virginians in the workplace

Richmond, VA— Today, the Virginia Safety and Health Codes Board acted to protect the Commonwealth’s workers by adopting emergency temporary standards, which set forth enforceable, common-sense requirements that employers must follow to protect their workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By doing so, Virginia became the first state in the nation to enact coronavirus-era safety emergency standards that companies are required to implement to protect workers from infection, which will then mitigate the spread of this deadly disease back out into the community.

The standards will be in place for six months unless replaced by a permanent standard or repealed. The required protections will vary depending on the risk of exposure to the virus associated with a given job. Key requirements, such as those for physical distancing, workplace sanitization, and information sharing, will apply to all workers.

Although guidelines for critical safety measures were published by the Centers for Disease Control, they were mere *recommendations, meaning they were not required*. Employers could—and did—ignore them at will, therefore endangering their workers and the public at large. But no more. By virtue of these new standards, workers will now benefit from a host of key protections that employers *must* implement.

Jason Yarashes, Lead Attorney and Program Coordinator at the [Legal Aid Justice Center](#), applauded the Board’s decision: “This historic victory will ensure that workers’ health is protected and that businesses are part of the solution to curbing the spread of the virus. We commend Governor Northam, the Virginia Department of Labor and Industries, and the Board

for being leaders on the right side of history in passing this emergency standard.”

“This emergency temporary standard protects all workers as well as the families who interact with workers. Nothing is more significant in the fight against COVID-19 than passage of this standard,” said Kim Bobo, executive director of the [Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy](#).

Doris Crouse-Mays, President of the Virginia AFL-CIO stated, “Finally, Virginia has demonstrated that it values workers. We now have standards that will protect workers, families, and communities by keeping them as safe as possible during this unprecedented time.”

“Due to anti-worker policies and structural racism in our economic, labor, and healthcare systems, Black, Brown, and Indigenous workers are overrepresented in frontline jobs and are at higher risk of infection and mortality from COVID-19. This new standard ensures all of Virginia’s workers have the basic safety protections needed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace,” said Debbie Berkowitz, program director for worker safety and health at the National Employment Law Project.

This breakthrough would not have been possible without the advocacy of the Legal Aid Justice Center and partner organizations Community Solidarity for Poultry Workers and Virginia Organizing. Legal Aid Justice Center [first submitted the petition](#) that set this process in motion back in March, when the critical threat posed by this virus first became apparent, and has continued to put pressure on the Board to step up and protect workers. The emergency standard is a major step forward in protecting workers in Virginia, and the broader coalition of worker advocates looks forward to working with the state to enact permanent standards.

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