Keep New York strong; invest in essential services

By Wayne Spence

The disastrous economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been unfolding in New York state for many weeks, with near-daily stories of the toll it’s taking on working people, our families and the services our unsung heroes provide in our communities. As a parole officer and union leader, I have never seen anything like this. If coronavirus is exposing anything, it’s that we’re all in this together and the time for action is now.

My members are showing up to work every day, despite the risk to themselves and their families, because they know they are mission-critical and because they care about their communities. PEF nurses and health care professionals, correctional facility staff and parole officers, staff at state-operated residential facilities, and workers across every other agency processing unemployment, disability and workers compensation claims are not making million-dollar salaries and do not receive $100,000 state pensions. But they do provide vital services to the residents of this state.

Now we need our elected leaders in Albany and Washington to do their part. We need federal support so our state can continue functioning right now, but we also need our leaders in Albany to spread the huge financial burden of paying for this crisis fairly across all income spectrums.

Without all of our elected leaders doing their part, New York will be forced to start cutting state services. Those cuts will hurt all New Yorkers, adding more people to the ranks of the unemployed and making it harder for everyone to recover — physically, psychologically and economically — from the coronavirus. Working people on the front lines are fighting for all of us. Now it is time for our federal and state leaders to stand up for us.

This pandemic should serve as a stark reminder that failing to invest in the services we need has dire consequences when disaster strikes. So let’s pull together to get through this crisis and make choices that will better prepare us for the next. That’s how we’ll get through this and get our economy going again.

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