



SEF Statement on Southern States Reopening During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Issued April 27, 2020

As of this week, [five southern states](#) have decided to reopen sectors of their respective economies. Announcements from the governors of [Florida](#), [Georgia](#), [Tennessee](#), [South Carolina](#), and [Oklahoma](#) gave permission to a range of businesses, beaches, and other public facilities to reopen under social distancing guidelines. [Four other states](#) – Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama – are allowing their stay-at-home orders to expire by Thursday, April 30.

The plight of children of color and children from lower income households is inseparable from the public health ramifications of a rushed reopening. Nationally, people of color constitute a disproportionate share of frontline workers relative to their overall share of the [U.S. labor force](#), with Black and Latinx employees representing [nearly 30 percent](#) of postal workers, [37 percent](#) of workers in leisure and hospitality, [41 percent](#) of food service workers, and [30 percent](#) of workers in retail.

Many of these workers already risk exposing their children and families to COVID-19 once they return home, creating the potential for higher infection rates among children. [High costs](#) and few options for childcare in the South further complicate the possibility of returning to work under expedited orders to reopen.

While Louisiana's leadership has not yet proposed a plan to reopen, the state has been a particular hotspot for COVID-19 with one of the [highest per-capita infection rates](#) in the country. Speaking of the need to protect workers of color, Dr. C. Reynold Verret, President of Xavier University of Louisiana, explained, "The unprotected exposure of lower income workers during the COVID-19 epidemic is one important driver of the emerging risk to African Americans and other people of color. A prudent response to the pandemic requires regulations that protect people on the front lines."

The political considerations behind decisions to reignite a stalled economy are undoubtedly challenging, but state leaders should not play politics with people's lives. A rushed reopening has the potential to lead to a higher infection rate, further delaying the opportunity for students to safely return to school, for businesses to reopen their doors, and for families to begin rebuilding their lives.

In community,

Raymond C. Pierce and the SEF Team