

Emergency Funding Request to Respond to the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Employees in the Hospitality/Leisure/Tourism Industry in South Florida

UNITE HERE Local 355, on behalf of the thousands of hospitality workers it represents in South Florida along with the Hospitality Employee Advancement & Training Center (HEAT), which is a training partnership between Local 355, hospitality employers, and the Southeast Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency, is requesting funding to provide emergency relief and recovery assistance to laid off hospitality employees in the region. This relief would be offered to both union and non-union workers alike. In just the last few days, we have been inundated with hundreds of calls for help.

Industry Impact in South Florida: The hospitality industry in South Florida is in a crisis of historic proportions. On March 13, 2020, President Donald Trump declared the coronavirus pandemic a national emergency, invoking powers to allow more federal aid to states and local governments. Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis has declared a state of emergency, as have the Mayors of Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. Since then, all restaurants, bars, and hotels have been ordered to suspend their operations.

In 2018, Miami tourism related industries attracted 23 million visitors and generated \$18 billion in revenue to the economy.ⁱ

According to BLS preliminary data for December 2019, 342,400 people worked in the Leisure & Hospitality Industry in South Florida. Of them, 150,000 worked in the Miami-Miami Beach-Kendall, FL Metropolitan area.ⁱⁱ

Immediate Impact on Hospitality Workers: As of the end of this week, approximately 90% of the workers who are represented by the UNITE HERE Local 355 and other hospitality workers are laid off or are experiencing drastically reduced hours. A majority of employers are not providing any pay for the laid off workers. The number of layoffs is expected to grow to close to 100% by the end of March as more food operations close or reduce operations to skeletal staff. In addition to the workers represented by Local 355, a high proportion of the 342,000 Hospitality and Leisure employees in South Florida will be without paychecks.

Hospitality workers live paycheck to paycheck. The lack of paychecks means that workers will miss rent payments on April 1, miss utility payments, be unable to feed their families, and are in danger of having no health benefits during the health emergency. The ripple effect of inability to pay their bills threatens them and their families, as well as the sustainability of public utilities and medical services throughout the region.

Relief and Recovery for Hospitality Workers in Miami-Dade County

UNITE HERE has a unique ability to communicate with laid off workers and has a working relationship with some of the largest hospitality employers in South Florida. As a result, the union will be in a position to conduct relief operations and recovery training efficiently and in cooperation with employers.

The Hospitality Employees Advancement and Training Center (“HEAT”) is a non-profit 501(c)3 which is well positioned to provide relief and recovery to hospitality employees in Miami-Dade. HEAT has facilities in the Overtown section of Miami’s Downtown through an agreement with the CRA.

Under this grant, HEAT proposes to provide relief and recovery training to 2,500 hospitality employees who are laid off as a result of the state of emergency.

Proposed Relief:

If HEAT obtains grant or donor funding, HEAT could fund case management services to assistance 2,500 hospitality employees in obtaining access to emergency resources, such as unemployment insurance, food stamps, Medicaid, utility deferrals, and similar resources. Given the difficulty of accessing public assistance and language barriers, workers are unlikely to obtain all of the public resources available to them without personal assistance.

In addition, HEAT proposes to provide \$400 a month relief to the most desperate 1,000 hardship cases among hospitality employees, for rent, utility assistance, and food assistance.

Proposed Recovery Training and Case Management:

HEAT proposes to provide case management and training which could be valuable to displaced workers returning to a future recovery of hospitality operations, such as Deep Cleaning Training to CDC/OSHA standards during this epidemic and English language online classes. HEAT would be in a position to consult with union hospitality employers to assess training needs during a recovery. Such training could be provided via online classes or other methods that adhere to public health recommendations of social distancing during this health emergency.

Amount of Funding Support:

HEAT anticipates that the organization can provide case management assistance to 2,500 workers and can help provide financial assistance to 1,000 hardship employees per month for the next 4 months. To do that, HEAT seeks funding of \$500,000 per month for four months to fund \$400 in direct support, staff case management to assist employees in accessing available public resources, and conduct recovery training, for a total of \$2,000,000.

ⁱ <https://www.bizjournals.com/southflorida/news/2019/05/03/2018-was-a-record-breaking-year-for-miami-tourism.html>

ⁱⁱ BLS reporting divisions