



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

Monday March 2, 2020

Dear Mayor Durkan and Executive Constantine,

I am writing to urge you to take a serious and proactive approach to the emerging coronavirus outbreak in our city and county, and to do everything possible to make healthcare available to anyone who might suffer from the illness.

Unlike every other wealthy country, the United States does not have the benefit of a universal, Medicare for All, single-payer healthcare system. Without Medicare for All, there is the serious danger that thousands of people in our community may contract coronavirus, but never have it diagnosed or receive care, because they cannot afford the doctor's visit.

Uninsured and underinsured people are regularly forced to avoid or delay getting the medical care they need, because they cannot afford the high medical bills and copays that are involved. The outcomes of a system that prioritizes the profits of a few in the insurance, pharmaceutical, and health management industries are often tragic in normal situations. But in the context of a global pandemic, the anarchy of this for-profit system could be lethal to many in our society. People who are priced out of doctors visits will be in danger themselves, and will spread coronavirus to their friends, family, and coworkers.

I urge you to open up the City of Seattle and King County's emergency funds to guarantee that anyone in our region with a respiratory illness has access to a doctor's visit without fear of medical bills.

Insurance companies or employers should cover all copays and other out-of-pocket costs, with the city or county providing support as needed. This should be advertised widely so that anyone with a respiratory illness knows they can get care at no cost to themselves. We also must demand that in addition to fully complying with City and State labor laws, all employers provide guaranteed paid sick leave as necessary, and maximum flexibility for employees to work from home.

An equal opportunity employer

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The Trump administration's total failure to respond to this crisis is further exacerbating the problems created by a for-profit healthcare system. This comes on top of the insurance giants and pharmaceutical companies having bought the elite of both political parties for decades to prevent Medicare for All. Unless urgent steps are taken, the combined result will be the real prospect of tens of millions of uninsured and underinsured people contracting the virus, and a crisis turning into a disaster.

One city or one county alone cannot create Medicare for All, but we can take emergency measures here to ensure that cost is not a barrier for our community to get the care they need in this immediate crisis and to avoid further spreading of the virus.

I urge you to take all necessary steps to make cost-free doctor visits available to everyone exhibiting signs of coronavirus.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kshama Sawant', written in a cursive style.

Kshama Sawant