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Mary Rasenberger

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Ranking Member Wyden:

We are writing to ask you for your support in ensuring that non-traditional and freelance workers continue to receive unemployment benefits in the next stimulus bill. Since enactment of the CARES Act in March of 2020, not only has the pandemic intensified in severity, with over eleven million Americans infected and more than a thousand dying each day, but the financial situation of millions of American families has worsened as savings diminish and unemployment compensation runs out. Non-traditional workers like the majority of Authors Guild members were already in precarious standing before the pandemic; they are now facing an untenable future unless Congress acts urgently to pass a relief package to redress their loss of income.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an estimated one-third of U.S. workers are freelance workers either through primary or secondary jobs. The Freelancers Union estimates that these workers contribute \$1 trillion to the U.S. economy. As self-employed workers whose earnings are reported on 1099s, they are not entitled to traditional unemployment compensation under state and federal laws. The CARES Act provision of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which provided up to 39 weeks of benefits to non-traditional freelance workers, is set to expire on December 31, 2020. With Senate gridlocked on the size of the next relief bill, and the Senate majority leaving out extension or expansion of the PUA program from its proposal, these workers will not have any support come December 31, 2020. Already, scores of such workers have exhausted their PUA benefits and are using their savings to survive.

Congress can avert the catastrophe awaiting tens of millions of American non-traditional workers by extending PUA at least until January 31, 2021, as set forth in the Heroes Act passed by the House, and preferably until the worst of the pandemic is over and all Americans can get back to work. In addition, Congress must address the mixed-income earner gap, which has led millions of non-traditional workers with incidental traditional employment being ineligible for PUA benefits or receiving minimal benefits. The pending Mixed Earner Pandemic Employment (S.4222), sponsored by fourteen of your Democratic colleagues in the Senate, offers to remedy this gap by allowing individuals earning at least \$7,250 per year from self-employment income to receive

PUA benefits. We request that you join your colleagues in becoming a co-sponsor of this critical amendment to the PUA program.

We thank you for the work you and your colleagues are doing to protect American workers, and stand by to provide any further information you need about these critical issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Rasenberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mary Rasenberger
Executive Director, The Authors Guild