

Hundreds line up to receive free food outside of Washington, D.C. area supermarkets

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20 April 2020

While national news media outlets have sought to focus on the handful of right-wing protests which have called for a re-opening of the United States' economy, a social catastrophe for the working population continues to develop in neighborhoods and communities across the country.

On Friday, hundreds of people from Maryland and Virginia lined up outside of local MegaMart supermarkets with the hope of obtaining free baskets of groceries to feed their families. The giveaways, held at four of the Latino-owned stores in the Washington, D.C. area, led to massively long lines which wound around the buildings and disrupted traffic.

Yoni Lopez, owner of the local supermarket chain, told press outlets that his stores quickly ran out of to-go food baskets. Lopez explained that staff began handing out \$35 gift coupons to people in line. Anarel Mejia, who was waiting in line, told Fox News: "I don't want to come out because I worry. I take care of my life. I take care of my son, that's why... he's not with me... but I need food... now I think everybody needs help." Mejia is also an employee of the store.

Like food pantries all across the country, Washington, D.C.-area food banks have reported a sharp increase in demand. According to the local CBS affiliate, the Capital Area Food Bank, which is the largest regional hub for food distribution to the needy, reports a "30%-400%" increase in demand for assistance. The food bank relies on shipments from local supermarkets. Since the onset of the pandemic it has seen a 75 percent drop in such deliveries.

News media outlets were quick to leap on store-goers for violating social distancing procedures. Such acts of desperation, repeatedly seen in cities throughout the country, are an indictment of capitalism's failure to properly care for the fundamental needs of working

people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Likewise, those suggesting that such conditions indicate the need for a speedy "re-opening" of the US economy, without proper protections in place for workers in grocery stores and other essential locations, will only hasten the spread of COVID-19.

According to Fox, over 400 people showed up Friday morning at MegaMart's Takoma Park location. The working class suburb is situated on the northeast border of Washington, D.C. and houses a sizable immigrant population. The Washington Post wrote last week that the pandemic is proving to be "particularly devastating" in neighboring Langley Park, which has an 80 percent-immigrant population, a large number of whom are undocumented.

"Here, countless cooks, construction workers and cleaners are suddenly out of a job without any chance of unemployment benefits or federal stimulus checks. Those who still work often do so in close quarters and at high risk of infection," the Post states. The publication cites a note given to leasers in a local apartment complex, informing them "that, although the coronavirus had closed the leasing office, it had not canceled rent payments, which should be dropped through a slot in a metal box."

Other nearby jurisdictions, such as neighboring Washington, D.C., have also excluded undocumented and informal workers from receiving rent assistance and other basic help during the pandemic.

While the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region and its surrounding jurisdictions have reported lower numbers than other major population centers in the US, it is expected that the capital area will see a spike in coronavirus infections in the coming weeks. According to the University of Virginia, it is predicted that the commonwealth will see a "surge" in infections in late

April or early May, reports WUSA9 .

The Post reported that known COVID-19 cases in the Washington region doubled from around 10,000 to over 20,000 in the week ending Friday. Maryland, which on Friday surpassed 10,000 known cases of the virus, Sunday reported that it had 12,830 confirmed cases and 23 deaths overnight.



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