



April 28, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Eyewear/ Eye Health & COVID-19

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of The Vision Council, representing a majority of the nation's eyewear industry engaged in the field of optical product manufacturing and distribution, we applaud your bipartisan leadership and ongoing efforts to defeat the coronavirus pandemic including your recent passage of the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act to replenish the Small Business Administration's (SBA) loan program. As manufacturers and distributors of the most commonly used Class I medical device in the U.S., the eyewear industry is essential, on the frontline and fully engaged within our communities in the battle against coronavirus. As an industry, our number one priority has always been the health of our workforce, customers and community.

As you may be aware, 76 percent of the U.S. population wears and relies upon some form of vision correction. At the consumer level, \$43.3 billion dollars is spent annually to ensure the eye health of America. This also translates into hundreds of thousands of jobs across the country manufacturing and distributing eyewear. As with most of the economy, the eyewear industry is currently shuttered leaving many consumers without the eyewear they require for daily living

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and a very large workforce anxious to return to providing essential eyewear products to our nation.

The Vision Council commends Congress for your ongoing advancement of stimulus and relief legislative packages to support businesses and workers in crisis throughout the country. The eyewear manufacturing and distribution community is comprised of both global and family-owned businesses that are simply trying to stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When health conditions are appropriate and policymakers decide on exactly when and how to “reopen” the country, our industry looks forward to continuing to work closely with you to ensure that our member companies will be ready to return to work and provide service to eyewear consumers with effective safeguards and protocols in place. As Congress continues to lead the way in combatting COVID-19, the eyewear industry respectfully requests your consideration of a few key priorities as you develop and advance future Coronavirus stimulus and relief packages, to include:

I. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As you know, it has become clear that America urgently needs personal protective equipment (PPE) to support, not only our hospitals and frontline healthcare workers, but all sectors of the economy. This unforeseen crisis has created an unprecedented demand for PPE that our nation has been woefully unprepared to meet. This is why during the next legislative response phase production of PPE needs to be ramped up in an historic way to ensure that the country is ready and well-supplied. During the recovery phase, policymakers must provide the tools needed to restart our economy. Ramping up production of essential goods, including eyewear, means that our employees must be able to go out in public and into their places of work confident that proper health precautions are being implemented.

The Vision Council strongly believes that access to PPE for businesses providing essential products and services, including eyewear manufacturers and distributors, will be critical and an absolute necessity for any reopening to take place. Further, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) declared that the delivery of such services are considered essential “to help State and local officials as they work to protect their communities, while ensuring continuity of functions critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security.” The eyewear manufacturing and distribution community recognizes that State governments are ultimately in charge of implementing and executing response activities in communities under their jurisdiction, while the Federal Government is in a supporting role. However, The Vision Council implores Congress to continue to provide robust resources and funding to ensure access to PPE for providers of essential products such as eyewear.

Furthermore, The Vision Council recommends that Congress include expenses related to the purchasing of PPE as an eligible expense for funds received from the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Keeping our employees and

consumers safe with be a priority when businesses reopen, but this will come at a considerable cost to businesses already struggling to get back on their feet. Allowing PPE acquisition to be an eligible PPP expense will help blunt the impact of this added cost.

II. Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program

The eyewear manufacturing and distribution community greatly appreciates the recent Congressional advancement of the SBA Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act to replenish funding for the PPP in support of companies and their employees, including eyewear businesses.

The Vision Council urges Congress to continue to support and fully fund the PPP and to explore further expansion of the program to allow more entities to qualify and apply for these temporary loans that are critical to the survival of so many businesses. We would also strongly encourage Congress to monitor the mandate of June 30, 2020 for businesses to restore full-time employment and salary levels for any changes made to employees between February 15, 2020 and April 26, 2020, or face loan forgiveness penalties. While we are hopeful all our member companies will be up and running at full capacity by that date, it is possible that states and localities could have restrictions still in place making that difficult.

III. COVID-19 Testing and Guidance for Employers

The eyewear industry strongly believes that COVID-19 testing is crucial and that Congress should continue to appropriate funds to ensure that Coronavirus tests are widely available so that all Americans can safely return to work. Guidance should also be provided to employers on administering employee temperature checks and COVID-19 tests. As you know, the key to reigniting our economy will rely largely on consumer confidence and their belief that it is safe to engage in commerce outside of their homes and in the marketplace.

The Vision Council and our member companies believe the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Department of Labor (DOL) and Equal Opportunity Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) should publish "Return to Work" guidance that clearly defines new safety and health protocols, best practices, as well as any new oversight rules and regulations. This guidance will be critical for the eyewear community as well as all businesses seeking to protect and preserve the health and safety of employees, customers and the community.

IV. Liability Protection

The Vision Council urges Congress to enact liability protection from state or federal claims arising out of the use of masks, respirators and other protective equipment and should allow manufacturers and distributors to use basic masks as well as other items designed to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their sites without fear of liability, if more suitable options are deployed for healthcare workers on the frontlines.

Thank you again for your leadership and steadfast resolve during this very challenging time. The eyewear manufacturing and distribution community looks forward to continuing to partner with you to combat, and ultimately defeat, COVID-19 and to work closely as the country thoughtfully and safely begins to reopen. Thank you in advance for consideration of our request. If you have any questions, or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at amills@thevisioncouncil.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "AMills". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a small dot above the 'i'.

Ashley Mills
Chief Executive Officer
The Vision Council