

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

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

As you negotiate a legislative spending package aimed at addressing the impact of the Coronavirus on public health and the economy, we, the undersigned organizations, urge you to include resources to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness and to help ensure housing stability for low-income individuals. Emergency funds for shelters, rental assistance, and eviction prevention tools are needed, among other resources, to address urgent needs in communities and keep roofs over the heads of low-income people. Given the scope and severity of this crisis, these resources cannot wait to be included in a future spending package; we must act now to protect the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness and our nation's lowest-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and other individuals.

Urgent Needs of People Experiencing Homelessness

People living without basic shelter are at a [particularly high risk of a Coronavirus outbreak](#). People experiencing homelessness have limited access to the preventive measures being recommended including handwashing, home isolation, avoiding high touch surfaces, and rapid access to health care to help prevent an outbreak. People who are homeless and unsheltered are far more likely to have chronic underlying health conditions that can make the disease more deadly. Because people experiencing homelessness may be living in congregated communities – whether in encampments or shelters – and cannot self-quarantine, we must prepare now to be ready to contain an outbreak among people experiencing homelessness, should an outbreak occur in their community.

To this end, we urge you to include at least \$5 billion in HUD Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) in any spending package to get as many homeless people as possible quickly into housing so that they neither contract nor spread the coronavirus, to support prevention practices in shelters for those who are not housed, and to prevent an increase in homelessness during this crisis. ESG funds can help local communities minimize the number of people living in homeless encampments and identify space, including hotels, for isolation and self-quarantine. An additional \$5 billion is needed help prevent people from becoming homeless by providing short-term financial assistance and housing stabilization services. Medical respite care is needed for people experiencing homelessness who are too ill or frail to recover from the virus on the streets, as well as resources to provide outreach and street medicine and a national moratorium on encampment sweeps to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

Urgent Needs for Low-Income Renters

We must take every step to prevent housing instability and homelessness as a result of a Coronavirus outbreak. Even before this crisis, more than 11 million families – the majority of whom live in poverty – spent at least half of their incomes on housing, leaving [virtually no margin](#) for an unexpected expense. Temporary declines of income and unreimbursed medical bills can quickly send the lowest-income households down the spiral of housing instability, eviction, and even homelessness. With the Coronavirus, many low-income, hourly wage workers may see layoffs or reduced wages, whether because they have become sick or need to care for a family member or because their employer cut back on their hours. Other tools, like unemployment insurance, are not enough to cover the full loss of wages for these households.

To address this need, we urge you to include in any spending package emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention tools. Low-income renters – living in federally assisted housing or otherwise – will need emergency rental assistance to ensure that they can remain housed during this crisis and not face evictions, and in worst cases, homelessness. Workers are already seeing reduced hours or layoffs that will force them to make impossible choices between paying rent and meeting their other basic needs.

Congress should also issue a national moratorium on foreclosures and evictions to help renters and homeowners remain stably housed during and after a Coronavirus outbreak. At a minimum, this moratorium should extend to federally subsidized housing, including public housing and other HUD housing, and for properties owned or insured by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Federal Housing Administration (FHA), Veterans Affairs (VA), the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Service (RHS), and Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC).

Additional resources will be needed to ensure that public housing agencies and HUD housing providers have the resources to keep residents safe and healthy during this crisis, and to provide renters with access to legal services and foreclosure and eviction crisis counseling.

It is critical to ensure that access to healthcare, housing, food assistance and other services provided in response to Coronavirus should be available to everyone, regardless of income, immigration status, or insurance.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and we look forward to working with you to enact major legislation to protect America's lowest-income renters and people experiencing homelessness during this crisis.

Sincerely,

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Bipartisan Policy Center Action
Coalition on Human Needs
Community Solutions
Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force
Demand Progress
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Funders Together to End Homelessness
Heartland Alliance
Hispanic Federation
Housing Assistance Council

Housing Partnership Network
Justice in Aging
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council on Independent Living
National Housing Law Project
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Network to End Domestic Violence
Minnesota Housing Partnership
Paralyzed Veterans of America
The Arc of the United States
True Colors United
UNITE HERE, International Union
Youth Collaboratory
Up For Growth Action