

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your leadership on ensuring passage of the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* to address the public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. As you begin work on the next package of bold initiatives to help Americans cope with the consequences of this public health crisis, we urge you to continue your strong efforts to protect one of America's most vulnerable populations—individuals experiencing homelessness.

We greatly appreciate that the CARES Act provided \$4 billion in funding for the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program, which can be used to conduct critical activities in the fight against homelessness through outreach, shelters, rapid re-housing (RRH), and prevention. This has established a strong foundation for protecting the nation's homeless, and it is imperative that Congress uses the next stimulus package to finish the job.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness has published an academic study that has projected that homeless individuals sickened by COVID-19 are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die than the general population.¹ Given this population's unique vulnerability to the coronavirus, it is imperative that the next stimulus package provide sufficient resources to keep safe our constituents who experience homelessness.

1. Emergency Solutions Grants: Expanding Shelters and Supporting Rapid Re-Housing

In the fourth stimulus package to address the impact of coronavirus, we ask that \$11.5 billion in Emergency Solutions Grants funding be included in this legislation.

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Estimated Emergency and Observational/Quarantine Bed Need for the US Homeless Population Related to COVID-19 Exposure by County; Projected Hospitalizations, Intensive Care Units and Mortality* (20 March 2020), <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/estimated-emergency-and-observational-quarantine-bed-need-for-the-us-homeless-population-related-to-covid-19-exposure-by-county-projected-hospitalizations-intensive-care-units-and-mortality/>

It has been estimated that the cost to safely shelter the nation's homeless population in a manner consistent with social distancing would amount to \$11.5 billion for the current year.¹ At the same time, the best way to promote the health of individuals experiencing homelessness is to house them in their own spaces, which would also help to open additional shelter space for individuals currently living on the streets. Therefore, \$4 billion in ESG funding should be designated specifically to house a significant portion through rapid re-housing. RRH is a Housing First program that provides short-term rental assistance and services to help people to quickly obtain housing, increase their self-sufficiency, and stay housed. Congress created RRH in 2009 during another sharp economic downturn, during the establishment of the \$1.5 billion Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program. This program had provided RRH and homelessness prevention to 1.4 million Americans for more than three years.

During this pandemic, the total projected level of ESG funding that is needed to be able to protect our nation's homeless population is \$15.5 billion – \$11.5 billion for the establishment of safe shelters and \$4 billion for rapid re-housing efforts. The CARES Act has already provided \$4 billion in funding for ESG. Therefore, we ask that the fourth stimulus package include an additional \$11.5 billion.

2. Housing Choice Vouchers: Expanding Housing Access to the Most Vulnerable

As noted above, the best way to promote the health of folks experiencing homelessness is to house them, and this is particularly true of the most vulnerable constituencies – seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with underlying medical conditions. Service providers to the homeless are using the ESG funding from the third stimulus package to prioritize this vulnerable population for placement in safe shelters or hotels and motels. However, when the pandemic subsides and the emergency ESG funding recedes, this vulnerable group is likely to become homeless again. Instead, we should start moving them into permanent housing right now.

This vulnerable subpopulation would not be well served by RRH services, which provides only a short-term rent subsidy, because they have high barriers to employment and independence. However, they would qualify for Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV).

The HCV program is the federal government's main avenue to assist very low-income families, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with underlying medical conditions to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs), which receive federal funds to operate the voucher program.

Homeless individuals who are elderly, ill, or have disabilities often lack the resources necessary to pay the rent but often do not need services beyond what is regularly available in the community. Therefore, we ask that the fourth stimulus package establish 200,000 new vouchers, which would be a \$3 billion investment to last at least two years in duration.

3. Emergency Rental Assistance: Preventing a Massive Increase in Homelessness

The third stimulus package included welcomed new moratoria on the eviction of renters. A moratorium has been imposed on filings for evictions for renters in homes covered by federally

backed mortgages for 120 days after enactment. Another moratorium also prohibits the evictions of most residents of federally subsidized apartments.

However, many renters will experience losses of income as a result of the economic downturn caused by this pandemic and will likely incur significant arrearages during the moratoria. They are at significant risk of eviction after the moratoria expire. The expanded coverage of unemployment insurance is very welcomed, but additional assistance is needed to assist individuals who are currently struggling to make ends meet, having their work hours reduced, or living on fixed incomes.

Therefore, we ask that the fourth stimulus package include an emergency rental assistance fund of \$100 billion, which would include contributions to HCV, ESG, Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance, and the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP). All of these programs have been used by previous Republican and Democratic administrations to address short-term rental assistance needs after disasters, thus preventing a massive surge in evictions from swelling the nation's homeless population. This fund would also provide assistance to landlords and other housing providers to stay solvent during the moratoria.

It is imperative that as a nation, we fund these critical programs in the next Congressional stimulus package to assist individuals experiencing homelessness. Allowing men, women, and children to live on the streets is not a standard America should be willing to accept, especially during a global public health crisis. We thank you for your support of these programs and your consideration of these important requests.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse
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Jerry McNerney
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James P. McGovern
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Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
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Ayanna Pressley
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Steve Cohen
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John B. Larson
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Thomas R. Suozzi
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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