

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 7, 2020

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

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

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As Congress negotiates the next legislative package in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the United States, we request that you provide robust emergency funding to state and local public health departments across the country.

Public health departments are leading critical COVID-19 efforts such as conducting diagnostic testing and contact tracing; collecting data on cases, hospitalizations, and fatalities; and spreading important public health messages. As they take on these responsibilities, public health departments have continued to provide mental health care and substance use treatments, STD and HIV surveillance, childhood immunizations and adult vaccinations, and other services that individuals, families, and communities throughout our states rely on every day. Facing serious financial and personnel strains, our nation's state and local public health departments are in desperate need of immediate relief.

Health departments are not alone in confronting significant challenges: workers, families, and small businesses are also under intense economic pressures that will not be relieved until we can safely reopen our society. However, we will not be able to resume economic and social activity until we can ensure that we have taken the necessary steps to prevent a sudden surge in cases.

In recent weeks, some of our nation's leading public health experts from across the political spectrum<sup>1,2,3</sup> have released strategies with specific steps that will be required to reopen society

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<sup>1</sup> On March 29, Dr. Scott Gottlieb, former Commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Dr. Mark B. McClellan, former Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and colleagues published a reported titled [\*"National Coronavirus Response: A Road Map to Reopening,"\*](#) which included in its thresholds for states to being to reopen a capacity to test all residents in a state with COVID-19 symptoms and a capacity to conduct active monitoring of confirmed cases and their contacts.

<sup>2</sup> On April 17, Dr. Tom Frieden, former Director of the CDC, published a report titled [\*"Box It In,"\*](#) which identified four crucial actions to prevent future outbreaks of the virus: (1) making rapid diagnostic tests widely available; (2) isolating infected people; (3) tracing the contacts of infected people; and (4) quarantining exposed individuals.

<sup>3</sup> On April 27, a group of public health and health care experts – including Andy Slavitt, former Acting Administrator of CMS; Dr. Scott Gottlieb, former Commissioner of FDA; Dr. Bill Frist, former U.S. Senate Majority Leader; Dr. Atul Gawande, CEO of Haven; Mike Leavitt, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); Dr. Leana Wen, former Baltimore City Health Commissioner; and Dr. Vivek Murthy, former Surgeon General of the U.S., among others – published a [\*letter to Congressional Leaders\*](#) stating that the "key to reopening the economy" is the ability to "test, trace, and self-isolate."

while minimizing the risk of a new wave of cases that would threaten the capacity of our health care system. Each of these reopening plans focuses on three core components:

- (1) The ability to conduct diagnostic testing at scale;
- (2) The ability to conduct contact tracing and alert those who have been exposed to an infected individual; and
- (3) The ability to keep infected individuals isolated to prevent further spread.

To carry out the testing and contact tracing that will be needed to prevent additional outbreaks as we move towards reopening society, we will need our state and local public health departments to lead the way. Public health departments have the laboratory experience to help with the continued acceleration of testing, and STD programs have years of experience doing contract tracing through highly skilled Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS). This background provides a strong foundation for expanding our diagnostic testing capacity and growing the scaled-up force of contact tracers that will be required to contain future spread of the virus.

Without our state and local public health departments, we will not be able to take the necessary steps to reopen safely. Without adequate funding, our nation's public health departments will not be able to fully execute their urgent work. Therefore, we encourage you to provide direct emergency funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to state and local public health departments, including to public health laboratories and DIS, in the next COVID-19 relief package.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you to ensure that our nation's public health infrastructure is fortified and prepared for the reopening of society in the weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,

Lauren Underwood  
Member of Congress

Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

David Trone  
Member of Congress

Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

Marcia L. Fudge  
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

Sylvia R. Garcia  
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore  
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Susan A. Davis  
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Angie Craig  
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Ilhan Omar  
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Alan Lowenthal  
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Jahana Hayes  
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TJ Cox  
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Stephen F. Lynch  
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Diana DeGette  
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Mary Gay Scanlon  
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John Yarmuth  
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Lucille Roybal-Allard  
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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
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Tim Ryan  
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Elissa Slotkin  
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Bradley S. Schneider  
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Jim Cooper  
Member of Congress