

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you and your colleagues begin work on the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY2021) Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to increase funding for the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program (PHEP) and the Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP). As our country confronts the outbreak of novel COVID-19, the importance of sustained investments in health care system preparedness is clearer than ever.

PHEP is a critical source of funding for state, local, tribal, and territorial public health departments. Being prepared to prevent, respond to, and rapidly recover from public health threats is critical for protecting and securing our nation's public health. We appreciate that the committee provided level funding for PHEP in FY2020. However, this level of investment is inadequate and PHEP funding has declined 28.1 percent since FY2002, prompting concerns among state and local planners over their ability to sustain the real and measurable advances made in public health preparedness.

Like PHEP, HPP helps the health care delivery system save lives during emergencies and disaster events that exceed the day-to-day capacity and capability of existing health and emergency response systems. HPP is the only source of federal funding for health care delivery system readiness, intended to improve patient outcomes and enable rapid recovery. Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local hospitals have cited HPP as a key resource in enabling preparedness to respond to COVID-19. We thank the committee for boosting funding for HPP in FY2020. However, over the last eighteen years federal funding for HPP has significantly decreased, from \$514 million in FY2003 to \$275.55 million in FY2020. We must ensure HPP is adequately funded so that hospitals and health care coalitions can continue to protect the population during the next disaster.

We recognize and appreciate that Congress has provided additional emergency funding for both PHEP grantees and the HPP this month to respond to COVID-19. While this additional funding was necessary to provide immediate assistance to public health departments and hospitals, it underscores that the regular annual appropriations for these two programs are insufficient to empower our health system to adequately prepare for public health emergencies. Funding for PHEP, HPP, and other public health programs should be strong enough to achieve long-term

preparedness, so that we do not lurch from one public health crisis to the next.

As we confront COVID-19, the federal government must also make the important investments to ensure that our hospitals, public health systems, and their respective preparedness programs are ready to face future challenges. Without increased funding, state and local health officials will face difficult choices about how to prioritize federal dollars, potentially leaving our communities unprepared when new public health threats emerged. We ask that you increase federal funding for PHEP and HPP to ensure that public health agencies, hospitals and health care coalitions have the necessary resources to respond to public health and other emergencies and disasters.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator