

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

March 16, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable David L. Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Pete T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Administrator Gaynor, Secretary Perdue, and Secretary Bernhardt:

We write to request your immediate assistance in mobilizing your agencies to offer coordinated support for rural counties, municipalities, and tribal communities as they respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Rural communities are working to set up local emergency operation centers to help manage their response, but face challenges with limited staff capacity. Across many of our states, rural counties are experiencing outbreaks and some communities are already overwhelmed with the challenge.

Throughout rural America, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture employ thousands of federal civil servants who have the relevant experience to assist with emergency response. For example, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management employ thousands of staff across the country who are Incident Command System qualified and have experience rapidly responding to forest fires, mobilizing critical resources, and managing information flow in times of crisis. With this expertise available, it is crucial that the Federal Emergency Management Agency provide the authorities necessary and work with both agencies to deliver effective, coordinated assistance to rural communities.

We believe these federal professionals are well suited to partner with rural counties and municipalities to enhance staff capacity and support communities facing this public health crisis. Therefore, in light of the national emergency declaration, we urge you to take immediate steps to ensure your agencies are working together to make your respective staff and resources available and able to assist with emergency response to COVID-19 across the country.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Senator Michael F. Bennet

Senator Mark R. Warner

Senator Gary C. Peters

Senator Tom Udall

Senator Bernard Sanders

Senator Kamala D. Harris

Senator Chris Van Hollen

Senator Doug Jones

Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley

Senator Catherine Cortez Masto

Senator Tina Smith

Senator Elizabeth Warren

Senator Cory Gardner

Senator Steve Daines

Senator Debbie Stabenow

Senator Tammy Baldwin

Senator Krysten Sinema

Senator Martin Heinrich

Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Senator Amy Klobuchar

Senator Ron Wyden

Senator Thomas R. Carper

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

Senator Jon Tester