

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy,

As you consider the next legislative package in response to COVID-19, we urge you to include supplemental appropriations to ensure HIV/AIDS treatment, prevention, and housing programs are able to adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and continue providing life-saving services to people living with and at risk of HIV and AIDS.

We thank you for including \$90 million for the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program and \$65 million for the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Program in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act. This funding is working now to provide services, including telehealth, medication, housing, food, and emergency support services for people living with HIV and AIDS nationwide.

In the next COVID-19 response, we urge Congress to include supplemental funding for the following programs:

\$500 million for HRSA's Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program

Ryan White Program providers and community-based organizations are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, and they need additional funding to meet the pressing current needs of their patients and clients. Ryan White Program clients are especially vulnerable to the dangers of COVID-19 infection, as they share a number of risk factors with those who are more likely to die of the disease, including underlying conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and chronic lung disease in addition to other factors including systematic racism, poor insurance coverage, food insecurity, and unstable housing. Ryan White clinics nationwide have shifted care to telehealth to protect patients during the pandemic but providing access to phones with

sufficient minutes for patients and telehealth equipment for providers and clinics has been an immediate cost that clinics must support. Additionally, clinics are providing significantly more case management services and support to an increasing number of patients who are experiencing increased or new impoverishment from the current recession. Ryan White Programs are covering new costs, including medications (prescription and over-the-counter), behavioral health services, and access to basic necessities, such as food and shelter that is appropriate during COVID-19. Finally, as infectious diseases experts, Ryan White Program teams are on the frontlines of both the HIV and COVID-19 pandemics, often doing multiple jobs at once, and they need safety and protection, including PPE and mental health support. Additional funding across the program's parts would help people living with HIV and AIDS stay in care and on treatment; maintain access to care and treatment during the economic downturn; meet the new needs of people living with HIV and AIDS who now are without health insurance; keep clinics open and providers employed; and prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19.

\$100 million for CDC's Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention

As HIV prevention and surveillance staff are shifted to work on the COVID-19 response, it is important that the infrastructure of HIV prevention remains intact. HIV prevention programs at state and local health departments and community-based organizations are in immediate need of additional funds to continue to provide services critical to reach the goals of the Ending the HIV Epidemic Initiative. HIV prevention programs at state and local health departments and community-based organizations have been forced to reduce and/or suspend core HIV prevention activities, redirect personnel to respond to COVID-19, reduce and/or suspend HIV testing, suspend pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) initiations, and transition to telehealth services.

\$65 million for HUD's Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) Program

HOPWA is already seeing increases in demand for housing services during this pandemic. Demand for supportive housing and rental assistance will increase as the economic impacts of COVID-19 are felt. Social-distancing and quarantines are impossible if a person living with HIV or AIDS does not have housing, and we must continue to strengthen funding for HOPWA to promote the safety of clients, their families, and the community.

\$58 million for CDC's Infectious Disease and Opioid Program and Ending the Ban on Federal Funding for Syringe Service Programs

The COVID-19 pandemic already has resulted in increased drug overdoses, homelessness, and unemployment. Now is the time to end the ban on federal funding for syringes and other supplies, and support infectious diseases and opioid programs at the CDC. Syringe Services Programs (SSPs) are one of the most effective ways to prevent drug overdoses as well as engage and serve individuals who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Clients trust SSPs as care providers and sources of information and have been reaching out for help and support during this crisis as they have been experiencing greater needs – including the need for shelter, food, healthcare, and access to medication assisted treatment – as a result of new or increased levels of impoverishment from the dramatic economic downturn. There also has been an urgent need for greater access to naloxone, especially since physical distancing has created social isolation that has increased overdose risk and incidents.

This additional support for HIV/AIDS treatment, prevention, and housing programs is critical for ensuring that we can respond to two different pandemics that have impacted millions of Americans. Thank you for your leadership in our nation's response to COVID-19 as well as your long-standing support of people living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tammy Baldwin
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez
Robert Menendez
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith
Tina Smith
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator