

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 18, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

As the Senate and House finalize emergency COVID relief legislation to support American families, workers, and communities, I urge you to ensure that no one is left behind by providing robust funding for the following programs that are essential to California's workers, students, and families:

- **Federal vaccination centers**

I urge you to provide additional funding for the Disaster Relief Fund to ensure that FEMA can expand its collaboration with states to open additional federal vaccination sites. California's diversity makes adequate funding and placement of federal vaccine sites essential to address the COVID-19 crisis. California is working with the Biden Administration to create large-scale vaccination sites, but it's already clear that more will be needed. Both are home to some of the most diverse communities in California that are also among the most impoverished. These sites are a start – but more needs to be done. The geographical size and complexity of California make additional large-scale vaccination sites crucial in vaccinating every Californian.

- **Housing Assistance**

Record unemployment during the COVID-19 crisis has forced many families to stretch their paychecks to cover basic necessities, particularly housing. Millions of Californians are struggling to pay their rent and keep up with their mortgages, and as many as 40 million renters in the United States are at risk of losing their homes. As California rent prices are some of the highest in the nation, rental assistance programs like Section 8 help keep Californians in their homes. I urge you include additional funding for rental and mortgage assistance programs.

- **Transit**

Increasing support for transit is necessary for essential workers and crucial for communities across California. Public transportation systems in California are struggling because of reduced ridership, increased COVID safety costs, and a sharp decline in transit tax revenues. Moreover, the majority of California's essential workers are disproportionately Latino or Black residents and depend on public transit. I urge you to include at least \$30 billion to support struggling transit systems nationwide.

- **Making mixed-status families eligible for direct payments**

There are nearly 17 million people in the United States that have at least one undocumented family member living in the same household, including 4.5 million in California. Almost 80% of migrants in California are parents, and many live in communities that are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. I urge you to ensure that mixed-status households remain eligible for direct payments and that other forms of assistance for states have sufficient flexibility to allow states to support undocumented members of our communities.

- **Pandemic EBT**

The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020* (PL 116–127) authorized states to provide food benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to children who normally receive free and reduced-priced lunch at school. Known as Pandemic-EBT, this program provides additional EBT benefits to help families fill the gap in meals that would normally be provided at school. Over half of students in California are eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch, and this program provides a critical lifeline for families struggling to put food on the table. As California schools prioritize student and teacher safety, I urge you to include significant funding and continued state flexibility for the Pandemic-EBT program.

- **Access to high-speed internet**

Given the need for remote work and schooling during the pandemic, it is more important than ever that all Americans have access to reliable high-speed internet. Unfortunately, many communities in California, particularly communities of color, still struggle with access to reliable broadband services. Almost half of low-income households with school-aged children reported no broadband subscription at home, citing cost as the main issue. Therefore, I urge you to include significant additional funding to expand broadband access.

- **Environmental justice grants**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides environmental justice grants to help communities in California address local public health issues. These grants empower community-based organizations to work with communities to develop and implement directed solutions to environmental justice problems at a local level. Since the program's start in 2000, environmental justice grants have funded over 60 programs across California. I urge you to include at least \$50 million for environmental justice grants in this next package.

- **Health care for Native communities**

The Indian Health Service (IHS) serves as a crucial source of health care for native communities across the country, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. American Indians and Alaska Natives are dying at twice the rate of White Americans due to COVID-19. California is home to 107 federally recognized tribes and the highest number of people of native heritage of any state. I urge you to include at least \$8 billion for the Indian Health Service to maintain and expand access to health care for our native communities.

- **PPP eligibility for non-profits**

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) provides forgivable loans to small-businesses and non-profits during the COVID-19 crisis. This money is used to help small businesses and non-profits continue to provide paychecks to their workers. California is home to roughly 92,000 active non-profits that account for nearly one-sixth of California's Gross State Product. Further, non-profits provide crucial services to historically underserved and under-resourced communities. I urge you to ensure that PPP loan eligibility is broadened to include the non-profit organizations that are pillars of many of our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated communities across the United States over the past year, and California is no exception. As you finalize the next COVID relief package, I urge you to ensure that no communities, families, and workers are left behind.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator

AP/lr