

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

We write to express our concern regarding the ability of seniors and people with disabilities to continue to access critical home and community based services as the U.S. responds to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Specifically, we urge you to ensure that gathering places for seniors and people with disabilities, as well as the home care workers that serve them, are adequately equipped to protect some of the most at-risk Americans from this virus.

Seniors and people with disabilities often rely on critical services both through their local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to remain in their homes and communities. In 2017, AAAs, senior centers and local provider organizations served over 10 million individuals ages 60 and up through a variety of crucial services authorized under the Older Americans Act, including home delivered meals and congregate meals at senior centers.<sup>1</sup> Also, in 2017, 4.6 million Americans received supports at home through Medicaid HCBS.<sup>2</sup> Combined, these programs support seniors and people with disabilities through a network of providers, allowing them to remain at home – which is overwhelmingly where they prefer to be.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at this time most Americans are thought to have little immediate risk of exposure to COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, initial research has shown that people with pre-existing health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, hypertension and cancer are at an increased risk of serious complications if infected with COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> Older adults are more likely than other people to experience one or more of these chronic conditions. It is our concern that the organizations and health care workers that serve seniors in their homes and communities could, without proper

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, "FY 2017 Report to Congress: Older Americans Act."

<sup>2</sup> M. O'Malley Watts, M. Musumeci, P. Chidambaram, "Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Enrollment and Spending" *Kaiser Family Foundation* (February 2020) <http://files.kff.org/attachment/Issue-Brief-Medicaid-Home-and-Community-Based-Services-Enrollment-and-Spending>.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Summary" (March 3, 2020) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html>.

<sup>4</sup> W. Zunyou, J. McGoogan, "Characteristics of and Important Lessons From the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak in China: Summary of a Report of 72 314 Cases From the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention" *JAMA* (February 24, 2020) <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2762130>.

training and protection, inadvertently spread COVID-19 among at-risk seniors and be put at risk themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, seniors and people with disabilities rely on a network of services to remain in their homes and communities and asking them to stay home, to avoid the community organizations that serve them, or to deny a home care worker access to their home would have unintended consequences. We urge you to provide clarity on the steps taken to protect seniors, people with disabilities and the workforce that provides them essential services as COVID-19 spreads. We request you provide answers to the following questions:

1. How will the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) ensure that seniors and people with disabilities continue to receive necessary services through the aging network?
  - a. Please provide a copy of any guidance the Administration for Community Living has provided to State Units on Aging and AAAs regarding COVID-19, including guidance on the use or provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies, what AAAs should do in the event of a local community outbreak and what steps agencies should take to prepare for the virus.
  - b. Please describe the process in place to guarantee that seniors and people with disabilities receiving home delivered meals continue to have access to this service should their local service provider close.
  - c. Many seniors and people with disabilities rely on congregate meals through their local senior centers, please describe the plan in place to provide people with alternative meals, including the possibility of temporary home delivered meals, should their local service provider close.
  
2. For seniors and people with disabilities receiving Medicaid HCBS, many home care workers are employed at agencies that may not have access to proper supplies or available trainings regarding COVID-19. Please provide the following information regarding home care workers and COVID-19:
  - a. Please describe the steps taken by HHS to ensure that home care workers have access to PPE.
  - b. Please describe the steps taken by HHS to ensure that home care workers receive training on the proper use of PPE.
  - c. Please provide a copy of any education furnished to home care workers to help them identify possible COVID-19 symptoms and guidance to minimize the possibility of transmission amongst clients.

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<sup>5 5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "How COVID-19 Spreads" (March 4, 2020) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>.

Please provide this information no later than April 3, 2020. We also request a staff briefing no later than April 3, 2020. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

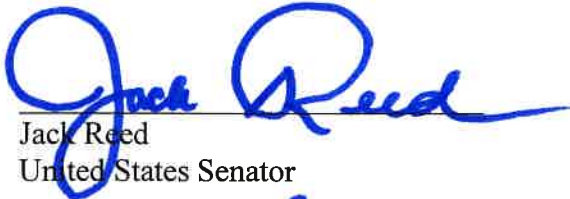
Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



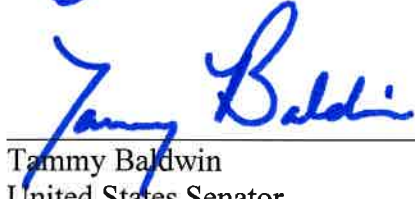
Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



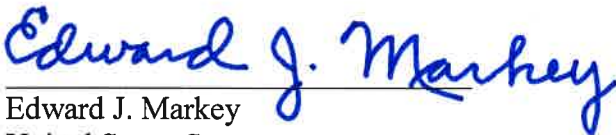
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



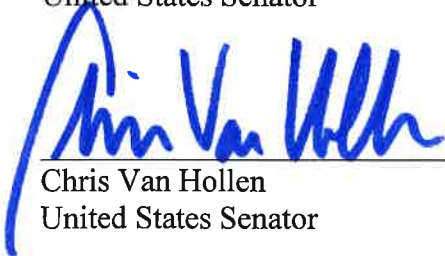
Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez-Masto  
United States Senator




Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



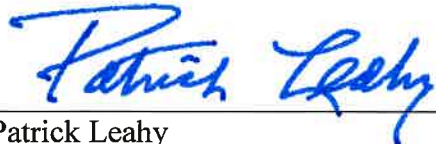
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



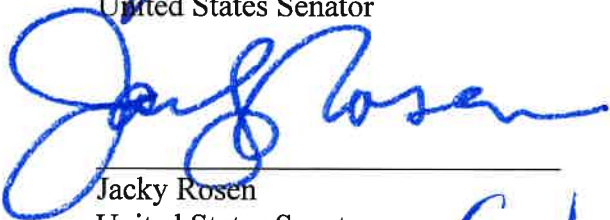
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Jon Tester  
United States Senator




Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



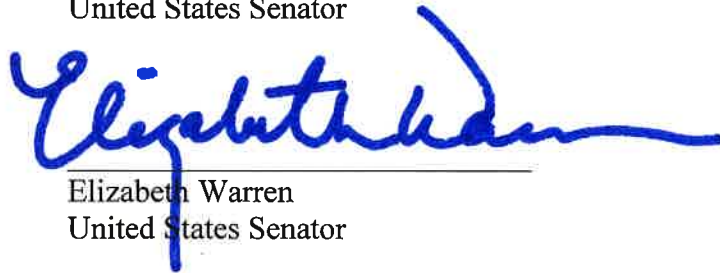
Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



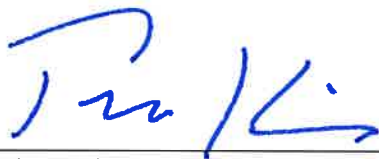
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



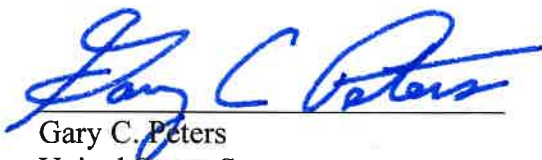
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



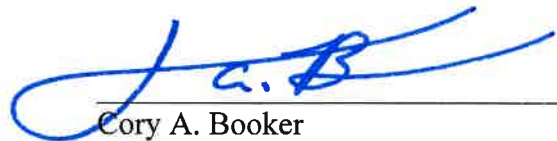
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



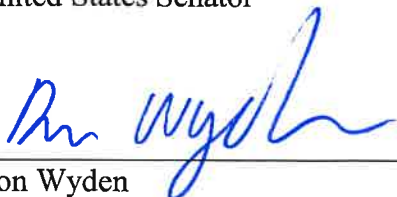
Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



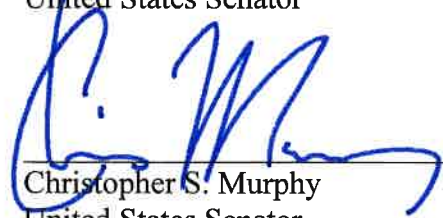
Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



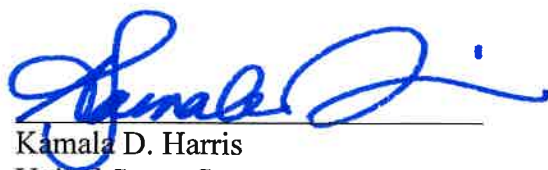
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



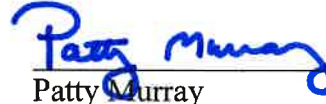
Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator



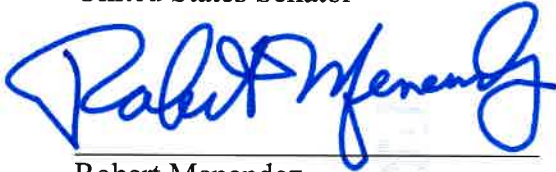
Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



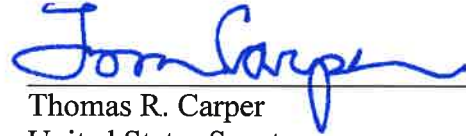
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator



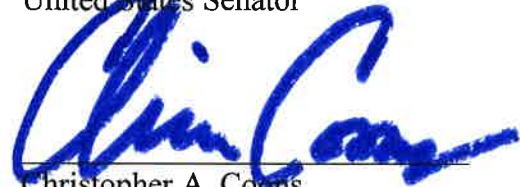
Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

cc:

Dr. Deborah L. Birx  
Coronavirus Response Coordinator  
White House Coronavirus Task Force