

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S. 128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Blunt, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Murray:

As COVID-19 continues to rapidly spread throughout the United States, we ask you to prioritize robust supplemental funding for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program. The CSBG program, as an existing block grant that serves over 1,000 entities across the country, is well-positioned to immediately respond to the social services needs of millions of Americans affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a time such as this, we must get federal assistance to local communities as quickly as possible. The CSBG program critically supports on-the-ground efforts to help address the everyday needs of millions of low-income individuals. In addressing challenges related to employment, nutrition, health, and transportation, CSBG-funded entities such as Community Action Agencies are already being called to action. This is a financially challenging time for the country as a whole. For individuals who were already experiencing, or were on the verge of, hardship, increased access to CSBG-funded services is needed now.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health crisis—it is also a financial crisis for millions families. The average American does not have emergency savings. Nearly 60 percent of Americans have less than \$1,000 in savings and 36 percent have none at all. Every dollar matters, and unexpected challenges related to COVID-19 that may appear minor at first can be devastating when compounded. For example, an older adult heeding CDC guidance to stay at home could face a significantly higher phone bill this month as they seek to stay connected to loved ones while in social isolation. Low-income families do not have the luxury of stocking up on food and cleaning supplies in order to best protect themselves from the virus. These same families are managing normal health care needs with an intense fear of what would happen if they contract COVID-19.

Community needs will only become more acute as COVID-19 continues to cause disruptions to everyday life. As such, we also write to encourage flexibility in funding so local CSBG-funded entities, such as Community Action Agencies, can be mobilized to meet community needs without being constrained by previously submitted work plans.

Robust support for the Community Services Block Grant program is critical to empowering our local communities to meet the immediate and emerging needs of millions of low-income individuals across the county, both during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. We thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator