

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 16, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

We write to request help for rural communities that are suffering economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and are struggling to provide services for their citizens. In the best of times, our rural communities often operate on very thin margins, and in this time of unprecedented economic uncertainty they require direct assistance.

We were very pleased to see an additional investment in fiscal relief to states, tribes and localities included in the Interim Emergency COVID-19 Act proposed by Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer. As negotiations move forward on this proposal, we urge inclusion of robust rural funding and the consideration of direct payments to small towns and counties to provide support and relief to communities of all sizes across the country. Too often, funding for small towns and counties is funneled through the State bureaucracy before ever reaching the municipal governments that need it. Traditionally, rural communities must rely on competitive grant programs to receive funding, which puts a burden on small communities to apply for funding with no assurances of success when larger communities are guaranteed assistance through funding entitlements. In communities where duties at the county and local level are often shared, it is problematic to have our rural leaders competing against one another for pieces of an already small pie. As our localities work to provide direct response to the COVID-19 crisis, they need direct funding to meet the needs of their communities.

Communities are hemorrhaging funds as they continue to operate with diminished sales tax returns, an abandonment of the tourism industry and closures across nearly all retail sectors. Without assistance, our rural communities will face a serious downturn unless we provide them with the tools to address the complex challenges they face. In October of 2019, we introduced the Rebuild Rural America Act which directly addresses the needs of our rural communities by providing a dedicated, noncompetitive block grant to smaller cities and rural communities. The bill sets up a framework that we encourage you to adopt into your next COVID-related bill. This framework would give our rural communities the support and flexibility needed to ensure that rural residents have access to vital public safety, emergency management and temporary assistance.

As you grapple with the needs of the American people in this time of global crisis, we ask that the Administration and Congressional Leadership come together to pass the proposed increase in funding for states, tribes, and localities, and include funding mechanisms that provides direct federal dollars squarely into rural communities and counties. These local municipalities are often best equipped to provide the services necessary to ensure rural residents can rebuild and come out stronger and more resilient than ever before.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Antonio Delgado
Member of Congress (NY-19)