

December 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-230  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, S-221  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

I write to urge you to include provisions addressing health equity in the COVID-19 relief package currently under negotiation. As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on low-income communities, Tribal nations, and communities of color. It is essential that the next federal pandemic relief package include funding that directly reaches these communities and enlists trusted partners to provide services and information that slow the spread of COVID-19.

From the beginning of this pandemic, people of color and Indigenous people in the United States have suffered the largest burden of illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that American Indian/Alaska Native people are four times as likely as white people to be hospitalized for COVID-19, and that Black and Hispanic/Latino people are 2.8 times as likely to die of COVID-19 as white people.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, a legacy of discrimination and abuse by the health care system has created mistrust in many communities of color, which can lead to under-utilization of needed health care.<sup>2</sup> The people who are best positioned to repair this legacy of mistrust are those who know their communities best. We must empower trusted local leaders to fight COVID-19 in order for essential public health tools such as information campaigns, testing, and contact tracing to be effective.

Many Members of Congress have recognized these challenges and proposed solutions. I recently worked with Rep. Barbara Lee to introduce the S. 4941, the *COVID Community Care Act*, which provides grants to faith-based and community organizations, as well as funding to the Indian Health Service, to conduct testing, contact tracing, and public outreach in medically under-served communities.<sup>3</sup> I urge you to include this bill in the next COVID-19 relief package

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity," updated November 30, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Health Serv Res., "Mistrust of Health Care Organizations Is Associated with Underutilization of Health Services," Thomas A. LaVeist, Lydia A. Isaac, and Karen Patricia Williams, December 2009, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2796316/>.

<sup>3</sup> COVID Community Care Act, S.4941, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/4941>.

to ensure that the communities most affected by the pandemic have the resources they need to respond effectively.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Warren", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator